

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1218.—VOL. XLVII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 4, 1886.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[GUY LED THE ANIMAL WITH KINDLY CARE; AND SO THEY ARRIVED AT VERNON GRANGE.]

VERNON'S DESTINY.

CHAPTER II.

As "the crow flies" Vernon Grange was close to Merton Park, but as a walk or drive it was more than ten miles' distant. The two properties were the nearest in the neighbourhood, and for many generations a great friendship had prevailed between the possessors. George Merton, a young man of thirty, cut off in the flower of life, had been almost a brother to Sir Guy; and many people assigned the young baronet's protracted absence from his own county to the fact that he could not bear the sight of strangers at the Park.

His mother bore his absence ill. He was her only child, and she worshipped him. Why Guy could not have stayed at home, and filled up his life with the ordinary duties of an English country gentleman she could not think.

He had been away now eighteen months, and she yearned for his return as only mother's

can; and, perhaps, had accepted the invitation to Merton Park for the sole reason that she saw no other prospect of avoiding a lonely Christmas in her own house, for nothing would induce her to entertain guests in her son's absence.

And now he was coming. In her hand she held the magic slip of paper that announced the fact. Another half-hour, and after all these weary months of waiting, she might really clasp her boy to her heart.

The sound of wheels dashing up the avenue, and Lady Decima went out into the grand hall. How very long the minutes seemed to her before the old familiar voice greeted her, and leaning on her son's arm she went back to the drawing-room.

"Oh, Guy, it is good to see you!"

"And it is good to be here. I don't think I ever knew how much I loved the old place before!"

"If you would only marry and settle down!"

"I shall never marry, mother, until I find her. I should think it wicked!"

He had gone to the root of the one differ-

ence between mother and son—the true cause that Sir Guy was an exile from Vernon Grange so often and so long.

"It is an absurd scruple, Guy. You know Mr. Mordaunt's opinion!"

"That the chances are she is dead. Aye, I know it, mother, and I take shame to myself that we, her kindred, should not know whether she is alive or dead!"

"It was her own fault!"

"I suppose so; but, poor creature, I often think if a little human kindness had been extended to her, things might not have ended so badly."

"And, for the sake of such a dream as that, you neglect the duties of your position, and wander aimlessly to and fro like some evil spirit!"

Guy laughed.

"It is not quite so bad as that, mother. I expend a certain sum in keeping the Grange in its present state, and I enjoy my own income. It keeps me in as much money as I need; and, after all, I am far happier than I should be here, the reputed owner of more thousands than I have hundreds a year!"

"She must be dead! She would be turned fifty if she were alive!"

"A great many people live to seventy, mother."

"Guy, you are too provoking. I suppose if you found her you would insist upon making restitution, as you call it, at once?"

"I hope I should."

"Then I hope I may never live to see that day. Just think what a life she has been leading all these years!"

"Whose fault is that?"

"Guy!"

"I did not mean to vex you, mother, but I wish you had not started the subject. I am going now to get off the dust of travelling, and when I return we will have a cosy tea, and you shall tell me all the news."

Lady Decima was wise enough to see it would do no good to pursue the subject. She was seated behind the silver urn, looking very beaming and motherly, when Guy came down to partake of the luxurious high tea which had been substituted for the more formal dinner.

"And how came you to think of coming home, Guy?"

The servants had gone now; mother and son were alone, and Lady Decima looked at her returned wanderer with a world of pride and affection in her eyes.

"I think it was your letters brought me chiefly, mother, the last one in particular."

"My dear! And I was so careful not to say anything about my loneliness. I tried to write as cheerfully as possible."

"I know," and Guy pressed his hand, "but you made me afraid you were getting into mischief, old lady, so I came post-haste to the rescue."

"Guy!"

"You have grown very intimate with the Mertons, haven't you? Now confess."

"My dear boy, if my holding aloof could possibly have brought poor George back, I am sure I would never have set foot in the place; but everyone called, and as I know the Major as a young man (your poor father liked him so much), I thought I really ought to call—a mere card couldn't condemn me to such intimacy."

"And has it stopped at a mere card?"

"Well, no. You see Mrs. Merton seemed so lonely, and the Major was so anxious she should enjoy my society, that—"

"That you forthwith took her to your heart of hearts. I know in your last letter you said she was just like a daughter to you."

"And you were jealous," cried Lady Decima, in a tumult of delight. "My dear Guy, I assure you no one could ever usurp your place."

Guy smiled.

"I am going to be very cruel to you, mother; I want you to give up Mrs. Merton."

Lady Decima looked aghast.

"My dear Guy, why?"

"She is not a fit associate for you!"

"Guy, you have never seen her!"

"I have never seen Mrs. Merton, but I had the honour of seeing rather more of Isola Travers than I cared for. She was a notorious flirt, and the talk of the place. One meets a good many shady-looking English at Beauville-sur-Mer, mother, but few quite so bad as the Travers's!"

"I always heard she was one of a numerous family of good birth and small means."

"Perfectly true! No doubt they were of good birth once, but if you had seen how they have sunk! I tell you the girls were the town's talk!"

"Perhaps she has reformed. Really her manner is most becoming now, and she never seems to speak to any gentleman except her brother and the Major."

"Which brother?"

"I suppose his name is Reginald. She calls him Rex!"

"Well, she has picked up the most respectable member of the family to introduce here. Rex is not half a bad fellow; and if he could

only leave off flirting and running into debt, he might become a decent member of society."

"He is going out to Australia to try his hand at sheep-farming."

"I know. I thought he had smiled before this!"

"He is going to stay some weeks at the Park; a ward of the Major's is come to live with them, and Mrs. Merton said she wanted her brother to help her amuse the young lady!"

"And you will give her up, mother?"

"My dear boy, how can I?"

"Well, not all at once, perhaps; but you can back out of the intimacy by degrees!"

"I was going to spend Christmas there!"

"Well, write and say I want you at home!"

"You were asked, too!"

Sir Guy shook his head.

"I couldn't be that woman's guest, mother. You don't know what she is!"

"She may have reformed, Guy!"

"Women like that never do; she'll make poor Merton's heart ache before he's done with her. As for the girl, someone ought to interfere. Mrs. Merton is totally unfit to have the charge of any young lady!"

"I shall be awake all night, Guy, thinking of it. I wish you would go to the Park, and see for yourself how nice she is."

"Has she a Captain Demill by any chance among her invited guests?"

"No, I am sure she has not. Except her brother and Miss Charteris, all the guests are to be from the country. Old neighbours of her husband's, she called them."

"Ah!"

"Must I really write and tell her we can't come, Guy?"

"I'll ride over to-morrow if you like, and take the onus of the refusal upon myself, if you prefer it!"

"Oh, Guy, I wish you would!"

"It will be better, I think. Mrs. Merton is not likely to require many reasons from me. She knows that I have been behind the scenes!"

It was a little after three when Sir Guy's room mare bore him to Merton Park. Giving the reins to his groom he inquired for Mrs. Merton, and was ushered at once into the drawing-room.

It was empty, save for a young girl who sat in the window reading. Guy had time to notice the graceful pose, the halo formed by the winter sunshine round her head, before she turned, and, seeing a stranger, blushed, and then grew as suddenly white.

She looked at him with such a strange, searching gaze that Guy felt she fancied he was someone she ought to know, and was in vain trying to recall his features.

"We have not met before," he said, kindly.

"I am Guy Vernon, a near neighbour of the Mertons, and I have ridden over to call on them and make my mother's excuses. We find we shall not be able to spend Christmas at Merton Park as my mother had arranged."

"Mrs. Merton will be here directly."

"I hope I have not alarmed you?"

"Oh, no! Can you wait? Perhaps if you would rather not see Mrs. Merton—I mean if you are in a hurry—you would entrust your message to me."

"I am not in the least hurried, if I am not intruding on you?"

"Not at all! I was only reading."

He took up the book, a volume of Tennyson.

"Are you fond of poetry, Miss Charteris?"

"I love it dearly; but how did you know my name?" asked Nell, who had got over her first amazement at beholding her dream-land hero in the flesh, and was talking to him quite naturally.

"I think I guessed it. My mother told me Major Merton's ward had arrived."

"Yes, I came two days ago."

"And you like the place?"

"I think I shall be very happy here. Isola, I mean Mrs. Merton, is so kind to me."

"And you like her?"

It was such a strange question Nell felt bewildered.

"She is very good and kind. She and the Major do all they can to make me feel at home with them."

"And I hope they succeed!" said a gay voice near them.

Isola had entered in time to hear the last question and answer. Wonderfully lovely looked she in a costume of ruby velvet, soft white lace at her neck and arms! She came up to Sir Guy with outstretched hand, but he could hardly have seen her intention, for he contented himself with bowing low, as he at once explained his errand.

He had expected Isola to expostulate and entreat. He knew his mother was one of the notables of the place, and that Mrs. Merton would know her market value; but to his surprise the pretty hostess accepted his excuses with perfect serenity.

"I said last night to the Major it was hardly fair to drag you and Lady Decima into society before you could half have exchanged your mutual confidences. I am quite sure you will both enjoy your Christmas at home much more than here."

"Your consideration does you infinite credit. I little thought when I parted from you at Beauville-sur-Mer I should meet you next in my own county."

"Strange things do happen sometimes."

"Aye. My mother says your brother is staying here. May I have the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with him?"

"Rex will be so disappointed; he has gone for a long ride."

"Perhaps he will look me up at the Grange; he and I always got on well, but I thought he had sailed for Australia before this."

"He is staying a little while with me; it is lonely here after the gay life we led abroad, and I can't bear the thought of parting from Rex. He seems my last link with old times and old friends."

Guy looked at her closely.

"Monmouthshire is not the ends of the earth. I expect old friends will continue to follow you here—Captain Demill, for example."

Mrs. Merton flushed crimson, but in a moment she had recovered herself, and answered coolly.

"James does not appreciate young men, particularly when they chance to be of his own profession, and I make a point of yielding to him in all things."

"Indeed!" with slightly lifted eyebrows, "then I am to understand you are transformed into a sort of modern Griselda?"

"Hardly that—we might be termed a sort of Darcy and Joan couple."

"You are fortunate to have such varied talents; that is the last rôle I should have suspected you of playing."

A little more fencing and he took his leave. Nell's little fingers in his hand for a moment gave him a strange thrill; he was thinking what a contrast she was to Mrs. Merton, and wondering what made her blue eyes so strangely familiar to him.

"I can't have met her anywhere; she is evidently fresh from school, yet I am sure she reminds me of someone. I wish I could send her from Mrs. Merton; she is a regular fad, and will end by injuring the girl cruelly if she finds she cannot make her as bad as herself."

And the two he had left were discussing him in this wise.

"What do you think of Sir Guy, Nell?"

"He is very handsome," returned Nell, a little absently; "but I don't like him, he seems so hard and stern."

"He was not always so," meaningly.

"Can't you guess why he is so cold and stern to me?"

"I think so."

"Depend upon it, Nell, no one ever hates a woman so thoroughly as the man she has refused to marry. Sir Guy is a far wealthier parti than my poor old Jim, but I never thought of him. It was love at first sight with me and the Major. I never dreamed over of marrying any one else."

"Poor Sir Guy!"

"He will get over it; he isn't a good-tempered man, and he is fond of saying sharp, unkind things. Don't get too intimate with him, Nell."

"I!" said Miss Charteris, opening her eyes, "why, I am never likely to see him again."

"Yes, you are. Guy Vernon has come home with but one idea, to seek a wife."

"But—"

"He always meant to marry young, and he has a double object in doing so now because he is proud; he will like to show me he is not mourning for me. He is a rich man, but there is some peculiar shadow over his property, so he is sure to look out for an heiress. Now, you know, you have five thousand a-year, and you are a dear little thing, so I think most likely you will have the chance of becoming Lady Vernon."

"Oh, don't!" came from poor Nell's white lips. "Oh! Mrs. Merton, don't talk like that, please."

"Don't be ridiculous, child! Surely you know in this mercenary age men like to have a fortune with their wives?"

"Not all men."

"No, not all," acquiesced Isola sweetly. "I think Rex would break his heart in silence rather than be accused of being a fortune-hunter. He is the soul of honour, but then there are very few with such disinterestedness."

Major Vernon was more annoyed than his wife had expected at the defection of the Vernons, but he never showed any displeasure to Isola, but other guests arrived in due course. Very soon there was quite a gay assembly at the Park, and Nell's days became one long round of pleasure and gaiety. Not one of that party of amusement-seekers ever seemed to have a graver thought than how to make time pass most merrily.

Isola was a charming hostess. However much she objected to her neighbours she smothered her distaste, and made her guests loyally welcome. Mr. Travers was her devoted assistant, and Nell found herself taking almost the part of a daughter of the house.

Everyone was kind to her, only Reginald Travers was perhaps kindest of all. He seemed ever on the watch to give Nell pleasure, to spare her vexation and disappointment, and Nell, who had a frank confiding little heart, was very grateful to him.

The greatest guest of all did not arrive till after the new year—a certain Lady Delaval, very proud and stately, who seemed to delight in keeping people at a certain distance, and demonstrating the fact that her blood was of the bluest, her descent of the oldest. She and Mrs. Merton had not much in common. She fell chiefly to the Major, who had known her years before.

"Who is that pretty child?" she asked him the first night of her arrival, as Nell passed her, in a white muslin frock.

"My ward, the child of one of my oldest comrades. I look on Nell almost as a daughter."

He brought the girl up to Lady Delaval, who took her hand, and made much of her in her own stately fashion.

"What am I to call you?" she said at last.

"Major Merton only spoke of you as Nell."

"My name is Helen."

"Helen what?"

"Helen Charteris."

The dowager drew herself up with stately dignity, let fall her velvet train, and swept away without another word or glance.

"She is very rude," thought Nell, to herself.

"I suppose she had no more questions to ask, and so dismissed me!"

But she was to find there was some stronger reason than that for the dowager's conduct. From that moment Lady Delaval avoided Nell as though she had had the plague, and forcibly interfered with other plans for her daughters when she saw them going to join in any party of pleasure that included Miss Charteris. Nell bore it bravely for a day or two. Then she spoke to Isola.

"Do you think I have offended Lady Delaval?"

"I wish you had, if it would induce her to take her departure. She is simply odious!"

"But she is so strange. She never speaks to me!"

"It's no use."

"And she calls her daughters away if they are near me, Isola. I have thought again and again, and I can't remember anyway in which I can have offended her!"

"Don't trouble about it, my dear."

"But I can't help it. Do you think, Isola, I might ask her what I have done?"

"If you like, but I think you had better let well alone. She will soon be gone!"

The next day was wet. Lady Delaval had established herself with a novel on a sofa in the west gallery, when a little figure came quietly towards her.

"Lady Delaval!"

My lady stared haughtily, but made no other sign, so Nell went on tremblingly,—

"May I speak to you?"

"I cannot prevent your speaking!"

"But I want you to answer me! Won't you please tell me how I have offended you?"

"You have not offended me!"

"You were so very kind to me when Major Merton brought me up to you, and then you seemed to change!"

"You are fanciful!"

"It is not fancy. I can't help feeling you don't like your daughters to speak to me!"

"I do not consider you a fit acquaintance for them!" Then, as Nell's lip quivered, the astute matron relaxed her severity, and said, in quite a different tone, "Haven't you any idea of the truth? Has no one ever told you?"

Nell looked mystified.

"No one has told me anything!"

"About your parents, I mean?"

"Mrs. Hamilton used to say my father was the truest gentleman she ever met!"

"She was perfectly right, but he made a sad mistake. He married a person none of his friends could notice. They were out on all sides, and at last he was thankful to exchange into a regiment ordered for foreign service."

Nell winced.

"Do you mean my mother? Mrs. Hamilton said she was very beautiful!"

"I daresay! That sort of person usually is!"

"What sort of a person, my lady?"

"I had rather not tell you."

"But I would rather know."

"I think he met with her in a hospital where she was nursing, but she had been an outcast in the streets. None of his family ever spoke to him again. Surely you must have known there was something strange about you? Why, you have uncles and aunts, not to speak of a grandfather, and yet you are left to the guardianship of mere strangers!"

Nell looked quite calm, and her face had grown very white and still; the iron had entered into her soul.

"I thank you, my lady," she said gravely; "be sure I shall not forget your kindness."

"I have not told you willingly, but you forced it from me. I would gladly have spared you."

Nell looked so strangely pale and calm that Lady Delaval was touched. She put one hand not unkindly on the girl's shoulder, but Helen Charteris shook it off impatiently.

"Don't!" she said sharply, "you might be contaminated. You forget, my lady, that I am the daughter of an outcast."

"I forget nothing, but—I am sorry for you."

"If only my father had lived."

"Better not; he just worshipped his wife, and he could never have been happy after her death. You will marry well, I daresay, and in a few years you will forget all about this interview."

"I think not, my lady. I am not good at forgetting."

"I knew your father well. I would help you if I could, only for my daughters' sake I

cannot encourage any intimacy between them and you."

"Do you suppose any one knows?"

"The thing was known at the time far and wide. It may have been forgotten, and you see it was more than twenty years ago; old people like me remember the story, the next generation probably never heard it. I don't suppose Mrs. Merton has an idea of it."

"I suppose she would turn me out of her house if she had. Lady Delaval, if possible—I came to you only half-an-hour ago—I feel as if I had grown suddenly into an old woman."

"You will get over it."

"I suppose so," said Nell, with a cheerless smile, "but I shall never be a girl again—never again."

CHAPTER III.

Sam went away with a slow and listless step. Somehow her novel had lost its interest for Lady Delaval. Manoeuvring mother, practical woman of the world though she was, she had some heart left, and all she had bled for Helen Charteris and her troubles. A strange impulse seized her to go after the girl and comfort her, but a nameless something held her back, and so she stayed on her luxurious couch, and Nell went on—to her destiny.

It was between four and five on a January afternoon, a cold bleak day, when the rain came down not in occasional showers, but in one steady deluge. Nell heeded nothing of the fury of the elements. She had but one longing for the open air. She wanted the fresh breeze of Heaven to fan her fevered cheek. She wanted, ah! so badly, poor child! to be alone, where no officious friend could disturb her; and so, half-unconscious what she did, she took up a heavy shawl, flung it about her head and shoulders, and went out into the gathering gloom.

There was no plan of action at Nell's heart. She had actually given no single thought to her future. She longed unspeakably for her old shelter at Minerva House. If she could only have gone back to Mrs. Hamilton's care; to the gay sallies of Lady Lillian, and the quieter mirth of Margaret Dean! If she could have drunk of the stream of Lethe, and this wretched month fade from her memory! But, alas! it could not. She could never again be a happy, unconscious school-girl. She was the heiress whom Mrs. Merton had hinted might be wooed for her money—the orphan whom Lady Delaval regarded as dangerous to all other girls until she had attained the honours of matronhood.

She walked on and on until the gathering shades of night, the increasing weariness of her limbs, warned her of the distance she must have traversed.

The Park grounds were far behind. She stood in a long narrow lane, with thick hedges on either side. Beyond her peeps of the far-off Severn; behind her a long, winding road! Nell stood aghast. It dawned on her slowly she had lost her way!

It was not strange. She had never been beyond the grounds alone; she had never been taken for walks or drives in the direction where she found herself.

All was new and strange to her. Not a single landmark pointed out her whereabouts. She was as completely lost as it was well possible for her to be.

Not a house was in sight. She saw no single trace of human life. In her troubled mood she had never noticed the way she came. She remembered dimly passing through a gate—all else was blank.

She was tired. Her trembling feet could hardly support her weight, and her dress was soaked through and through. She shivered with cold as she stood there, pondering what to do.

"If only I could die!" moaned the poor girl to herself. "If only it were not wrong, I would just stretch myself under that hedge,

and by morning light I should be dead. It would be better than living on, to be shunned and hated, and no one would be very sorry. Lil would cry, and think of me at first, but she would soon forget!"

A sound of horse's hoofs behind her. Nell tried to find her voice, and appeal for aid, but words would not come. They were not needed. The sight of a female figure, standing alone in that dreary place at nightfall, was enough to astonish the rider. He reined in his steed at once, and said, courteously,—

"Have you lost your way? Can I be of any assistance to you?"

The voice echoed through Nell's heart. She had heard it twice—first in dreamland, then later on in Mrs. Merton's drawing-room.

She forgot Isola's description of Sir Guy;—forgot that he was Mrs. Merton's rejected love. Nell had room but for one thought—he had offered to save her once in a vision; surely, therefore, he would save her now!

"Oh, Sir Guy!" and she stopped abruptly, but the three words were a revelation to him.

"Miss Charteris! Is it possible?"

"I have lost my way. Please tell me, am I very far from Merton Park?"

"About eight miles. What can Mrs. Merton be thinking of to let you be out on such a night, alone, like this?"

"She did not know."

Guy felt perplexed.

"Do you mean you came out alone without telling her?"

"Without telling anyone! I was feeling sad, and I longed for the fresh air. I walked on and on. I never noticed how far it was until I found myself here."

Guy looked at her closely, he feared she was out of her mind.

"I am quite well," said Nell, feverishly. "Oh, quite! Sir Guy, won't you tell me the way back to the Park?"

"Certainly not! You have walked already far more than is good for you. I shall take you home for my mother to look after you, and we will send over a groom to relieve Mrs. Merton's anxiety."

"But I cannot go with you. I have never even seen Lady Decima."

"That makes no difference. My mother will take care of you, my child," he added, gently. "Why, you are drenched! It is utterly impossible for you to walk eight miles to-night, and if I took you home and ordered the brougham to drive you to the Park, you would equally have to see my mother. Believe me, you need not fear her; she is most kind and gentle. All girls love her."

Nell shivered.

"She won't like me. Lady Delaval said no one who was old enough to know the truth could like me."

"My poor child!" said Guy, pityingly, "you are labouring under some cruel mistake. My mother herself told me you were to be as a daughter to Major Merton. How can you say such things of myself?"

"I don't know; I think sometimes it is an evil dream, and I shall wake presently to wonder how I believed it."

"I am sure you will. Now, it is a very little way to the Grange, but you are far too tired to walk. If I lift you on to my horse do you think you can manage to keep your seat while I lead him home?"

"But—"

"No but, please. Miss Charteris, you are my captive, and are going to obey me."

He raised her in his arms, another moment and she was in the saddle; the horse was sure, and knew his master's voice. Guy led the animal with kindly care, and so they arrived at Vernon Grange, much to the surprise of the butler.

"Where is my mother?"

"Her ladyship is in her boudoir, Sir Guy."

He turned to lift Nell off the horse, but she made no sign of hearing him. He looked into the still white face, and then took her in his arms, carried her through the long hall to the pretty room where Lady Vernon awaited him.

"My dear Guy!"

Surprise, consternation, and curiosity were all mingled in that cry. Sir Guy laid his burden on the sofa before he spoke.

"It is Major Merton's ward, Miss Charteris. I found her in the lane, mother, almost fainting with fright and exhaustion. She had lost her way, and got thoroughly downhearted. I know you will be good to her."

Lady Decima promised. She had had daughters of her own and lost them; perhaps this was why she loved all girls. She rang for her maid and restoratives, with her own hands removed the dripping shawl.

"You had better leave her to us, Guy!"

"I will; but, mother, there is some secret about all this. That cruel woman, Lady Delaval, has been stabbing the child with some cruel sarcasms, I suspect."

When Nell opened her eyes she was full of bewilderment. Her wet clothes had all gone; she was wrapped in a pale-blue dressing-gown. Her bright hair floated round her like a sail, and by the side of her sofa sat the prettiest and gentlest of elderly ladies, who looked up with a smile as the girl glanced inquiringly around.

"You are better now, dear?"

"Yes," said Nell, faintly. "Please, where am I?"

"At Vernon Grange. My son found you in River Lane. You had lost your way!"

"Ah!" Nell tried to rise. "I must go home, please; it is very late!"

"Past ten o'clock; but you cannot go home to-night. I have sent Mrs. Merton word I shall keep you till the morning."

Nell sighed. Her blue eyes fixed themselves on Lady Vernon with piteous entreaty.

"Is it true?"

"My dear child, is what true? How can I tell what you mean?"

"What Lady Delaval said."

"What did she say?"

"That I could never be like other girls. That for her daughters' sake she could never let them be intimate with me, because my mother was—an outcast!"

"My poor child!—and she could tell you that!"

"You knew it, then?"

"I knew that Colonel Charteris quarrelled with his whole family on the occasion of his marriage. Major Merton told me so, but he told me more than that. He said no wife ever made her husband happier—no wife was ever more truly a helpmeet than Mrs. Charteris. He said that when she died the Colonel felt the light of his life had gone out!"

Nell was crying softly to herself.

"It made me so wretched, I wanted to die. I thought I should never be happy again."

"The past is past," said Lady Decima gently. "I never knew the true story of your mother's life. I know there was something in it which deprived her of the entrée to London society; but, my dear, all this was long ago, I do not think her daughter should trouble over it. Remember your mother as what she really was, the joy of your father's life, and I don't think you need be very unhappy about her."

"How kind you are, Now Lady Delaval—"

"She has a peculiar reason for hating your mother's memory. She was once your father's betrothed wife; it had been a convenient arrangement planned between the parents at first, but she loved him passionately. She quarrelled with him and married Lord Delaval out of spite, but as a young widow she hoped her old love would return to her. You know she was disappointed."

Nell sighed.

"You can't think how strange and bewildered I feel. A month ago I was almost a child, and now—"

Lady Decima kissed her.

"My dear, you may from time to time hear unkind allusions to your mother's past, but, believe me, you need not feel desponding. You will find plenty of friends staunch and true."

A knock at the door. Enter Sir Guy, in

faultless evening dress—an anxious look upon his face.

"How is Miss Charteris?"

"Quite well," said Nell, prettily. "Please, Sir Guy, I don't know how to thank you for your kindness."

"I did nothing."

"Miss Charteris had better go to bed, I think," interposed Lady Decima; "she calls herself quite well, but her cheeks are flushed, and she will be feverish to-morrow if we do not keep her quiet."

Nell bade good-night, and went off obediently enough under the guidance of a maid. Mother and son were left alone.

"Well!"

It was half-inquiring, half-deprecating. It meant, "what do you think of her?" and understanding this, Lady Decima replied,—

"She is very pretty. I never saw a child who so touched my heart."

"She is not a child at all."

"She is only nineteen!"

"And under the care of such a woman as Mrs. Merton! Bah! she will be a practised coquette before many months are over."

"How bitterly you speak of Mrs. Merton."

"I believe I hate her."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you. That girl is innocent enough now, but she will soon corrupt her."

"I think you are too severe."

"Am I? Whom does she remind you of, mother—Miss Charteris, I mean?"

"Of no one."

"I am quite certain I have seen and known someone very like her. The moment I saw her I felt her face was familiar to me. I don't think I ever met her before, but I am positive I have met someone whom she resembles!"

"In your travels?"

"I think not. The fancy is more mixed up with my childhood's days, mother; do tax your memory and think. Did you ever know anyone like Miss Charteris?"

"Never!" returned Lady Decima, positively; but if Guy had been watching her attentively he must have seen a shadow flit over her brow.

That night, when all the household had retired to rest, and perfect silence reigned at the Grange, the stately figure of Lady Decima might have been seen making towards the west wing, a small silver lamp in her hand. One of the rooms in this wing was given up to relics of the past. It would not have been correct to call it a mere lumber-room, for stored there were things of some value, which a dealer in curiosities would have given much to possess.

No; the apartment was simply a refuge for whatever seemed out of place elsewhere, from rare old tapestry and old carved oak to modern vases, of which Lady Decima had tired.

The room was crammed with nick-nacks, some of them so rare that my lady kept the keys herself, and never let anyone, save her confidential maid, perform the dusting and sweeping needed from time to time.

She unlocked the door and entered, placed the lamp on a spindle-legged table of tulip wood, and turned instinctively to the further wall, against which some pictures had been placed, their faces hidden, as though the originals had committed some dire offence which rendered even their dumb effigies unworthy of the light of day.

My lady turned one of the pictures round, sank into a low chair, and sat gazing at it as one whose whole fate hung upon the results of that scrutiny.

The picture represented a young girl in the costume of thirty years before, strikingly beautiful, with large dark-blue eyes, and a gay, untroubled face, as though it and sorrow had never held close companionship.

For full ten minutes Lady Decima contemplated the picture, then she rose with a sigh.

"I wonder it never struck me before. Well, there is not much harm done yet. Miss

Charteris returns to the Park to-morrow, and Guy hates Mrs. Merton so deeply he is not likely to become her guest. I am sorry for the girl, poor child; but what are her interests to me compared with my boy's? Henceforward I have a new aim, a fresh object in life—to keep those two apart. If only my efforts can work aright, Guy and Miss Charteris shall never meet again! At any cost, at any sacrifice, I will divide them!"

(To be continued.)

BOUND NOT TO MARRY.

—O—

CHAPTER XXI.

A STAB IN THE DARK.

HUGH DARREL had lingered in the drawing-room for a while, thinking that Eleanor might possibly return, but she did not come, and just as he was about to go away Mrs. Pritchard joined him.

This observant lady had guessed very much more about Eleanor's engagement than she had been actually told, and she knew from recent experience that she was likely to get information upon the present state of affairs from Mr. Hughes rather than from Miss Rosevear.

She shook hands with him on entering, for though it was evening, this was his first visit for the day, then she asked lightly,—

"When is the wedding to take place, Mr. Hughes? We shall want good long notice, you know?"

"Has Miss Rosevear told you anything?" he asks, and his voice is so changed that it startles her—makes her look at him gravely and answer with genuine anxiety,—

"No, she has told me nothing; but I am not blind, nor deaf. It is easy enough for anyone to see that you and she are engaged."

"We were engaged," he says, sadly, "but she has just declared that she will never marry me."

"But why? There must be a good reason?" asks the lady, wonderingly.

"The only reason is, that I am Hugh Darrel," he answers, dejectedly.

"Are you, indeed, Hugh Darrel?" she exclaims, cordially. "Oh! I am so very glad. This is just as it ought to be, and Miss Rosevear will not become poor by marrying. It seemed a dreadful thing that a beautiful girl like her should be condemned to live unmarried, or to be reduced to poverty. I know the conditions of that will preyed upon her spirits; she was quite ungrateful when you saved her life at Dovercourt. Anyone who heard her speak would have thought she wished to be drowned."

"That was only the natural discontent which everybody feels at being controlled," said Hugh, sadly. "I understood her feelings, and sympathized with them."

And then he told Mrs. Pritchard the substance of what had passed between Eleanor and himself, and how she had just declared that she would not marry him.

The lady expressed her sympathy. Told him he must have a little patience and allow Eleanor's mind to become accustomed to regard him as Hugh Darrel; and she soothed him as only a kind, considerate, middle-aged woman could do, and she at length sent him away with the assurance that as soon as she perceived signs of relenting she would herself communicate with him.

All this time she held a note in her hand that had been left at the house by a young woman, and which, to save the lovers from being disturbed by a servant, she had herself volunteered to deliver.

With this missive she went to Eleanor's room while Hugh Darrel walked slowly out into the dark road.

The night was unusually gloomy, not a star

was to be seen, and though it was not more than nine o'clock the usually silent road seemed more deserted than ever.

It was the last night of the year.

People who had been to business for the day had reached their homes, and if they did venture out again they would not do so till a couple of hours later.

Others who have gone to visit friends are still with them, and are just beginning to be merry; and even the policeman seems to be off his beat to-night, or else he also has lingered at some garden-gate to wish a friendly cook a happy new year.

The wretchedness of the present, both for the policeman and for our hero, is patent enough, whatever the future may have in store for either of them; but—

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never is, but always to be blessed."

And, therefore, Hugh Darrel did not feel quite so desolate as perhaps, under the circumstances, he ought to have done.

His usual custom was to walk from Eleanor's house to the District Railway Station in Finchley-road, and travel by this line to town, and now, from mere habit, he went in the same direction.

Those who know this locality are aware that there is a large field which will, in course of time, be fringed with houses, but that now has a row of fine large trees on one side, and a footpath going right across from opposite angles, and thus shortening the distance by cutting off a corner of the road.

The level of this field is lower than the road by some three or four feet, and nervous pedestrians prefer going by the road—where there is an occasional lamp—to crossing the field on a dark winter's night.

Hugh Darrel was not nervous, and in his present frame of mind all roads were pretty much the same to him, and he went down the slight slope which leads to the field without even thinking that there was any other way by which he could go home.

The ground was wet and muddy, and but for the light from passing trains upon the lines of railway which lay in the distance before him, and the flicker of a few far-away gas-lamps, the scene before him would have been one of total darkness.

But the depressing night, and the discomfort which the drizzling rain caused him to feel, were in unison with the misery and disappointment consequent upon Eleanor's treatment, and when he had reached the middle of the field he shivered, although he was warmly clad.

Not a sound fell upon his ear save the whistle of a railway engine, and he was walking slowly rather than at a rapid pace, when, without the least warning, a man sprang upon his back with all the ferocity of a tiger, and seemed to be trying to strangle him.

Hugh Darrel had taken many lessons in the noble art of self-defence. He was likewise an experienced wrestler; and fallen upon by surprise though he was, by a quick sudden movement he caused his assailant to trip, and by a trick known to Cornishmen, he flung him completely over his head, not rapidly enough, however, to prevent the ruffian's dagger from being buried in his breast.

The Italian was on his feet in a moment, and then a struggle ensued which was but of short duration, and the assailant plucked the weapon from its fleshy sheath, as the wounded man fell fainting upon the green sward.

Count di Talmimo, for it was he, bent over his victim and listened, but he could hear no sound of breathing, neither could he detect any pulsation of the heart, and he dared not strike a light to see how he had executed his evil work, because, to have done so, would have been to betray himself.

The sound of a woman's voice protesting to a companion that she did not like to come across the field in the dark, warned the Count that at any moment his crime might be discovered, and he himself arrested, and as a

precaution against immediate alarm he dragged the body a short distance from the footpath on to the grass, and without any other attempt to hide his work he went quietly and stealthily along in the direction of Finchley-road.

His face, if any one could have seen it, was deadly pale; his black eyes looked dangerous, his black curly hair was tossed and tumbled and damp with mud; and his hat, which he had lost in the struggle and found again, was crushed and battered, and he was not by any means sure that some stains of blood were not upon his hands and clothing.

Men who hold the lives of others cheap are often most careful of their own, and Talmimo's chief anxiety now was to get to some place where, without exciting suspicion, he could remove all trace from his own person of this night's work.

He dared not go to a railway station, he was afraid to take a cab, and he longed—yet feared—to see his own reflection in a looking-glass, or in a shop-window, desiring to judge for himself what others would think of him.

It takes very little to make a well-dressed man look shabby, particularly if in the depths of winter he wears no overcoat.

And Talmimo knew this.

An overcoat would have trammelled him in the execution of his revenge, therefore he had not worn one.

The cold struck him as he walked along the dark and deserted roads, and he turned up the collar of his coat, buttoned it across the breast, pulled his hat over his eyes, turned up the bottom of his trousers and put on a split pair of dark gloves which he happened to have in his pocket.

By these trifles his appearance was sufficiently disreputable to make him escape recognition, except by one who knew him intimately, and in this plight he walked towards London.

No one noticed him, he was not asked whence he came, nor whither he was going, and so he walked on and on, until he reached his lodgings in a house situated in a street leading off from Piccadilly, which he entered with his latch-key, and stole up to his own rooms unobserved.

An exclamation of satisfaction escaped him as he reached his sitting-room door. Then he walked into the room, and found himself face to face with Florry Trefusis.

It needed only a glance to see that all formality had completely ceased between these two.

Something in the man's manner, something in the girl's dark handsome countenance, told a story which it would have deeply grieved the friends of the latter to read.

Rejected by one woman, Talmimo, like many of his type, had turned to the smiles of another, yet all the while jealous of the favour of the one who despised him; and he rewarded the devotion of his slave, as some men reward the devotion of a dog, by alternate caresses and curses.

He was in no mood for caresses to-night; and Florry's accusing eyes seemed to take in every detail of his appearance, and to read his guilty secret before he had time to hide it.

"What do you do here?" he demands roughly, but turning his back upon her as he speaks, the better to hide any tell-tale marks on his hands, face, or dress.

He forgets the fall which Hugh Darrel gave him, and therefore is unconscious of the mud that is upon the back of his coat.

But Florry sees it, jumps at her own conclusions, and exclaims with breathless agitation, while her dark face becomes very pale,—

"What is the matter with you, Victor? You are covered with mud! and—and—blood!"

She brings out the last word in a shuddering tone; and he, fierce and fearless as he is by nature, becomes pale and nervous, and glances apprehensively at the door, as if afraid that some one passing it might hear her.

"Fool!" he growls angrily; "I have ha

fall, and I have out my hand. Why will you make a row about what is nothing?"

"Nothing!" she repeats. "Where is Mr. Hughes? Is that his blood, that is upon your shirt-front?"

"There is no Mr. Hughes; he is a cheat!" is the scornful rejoinder. "That man's name is Hugh Darrell! Why do you start? What is he to you?"

"Hugh Darrell! Hugh Darrell! Nothing! But where is he now? Have you killed him?" she asks, planting herself before him.

He mutters an oath, and lifts his hand as though as he would strike her; but she is not to be frightened, and her big eyes seem to pierce his very soul as she looks at him suspiciously.

"How should I know where the man is? I have had a fall I tell you!" he retorts, savagely.

And he turns from her and walks into the inner room, taking the precaution, when he is once inside, to lock and bolt the door, so that she may not follow him.

When he returned to the sitting-room some time afterwards, having in the interval changed his clothes and removed all trace of the struggle in which he had been engaged, he found, to his surprise, that Florry was gone.

At first, he felt glad of this, for her presence made him nervous; and he sat down near the fire, and tried to enjoy the sweetness of gentified revenge.

But revenge is a passion that soon loses its flavour, particularly when the dread of consequences treads upon the heels of success; and after gloating for a little while over the thought that Eleanor's lover had paid dearly for the lady's favour, the dread began to loom upon his mind that suspicion of the murder would fall upon himself.

That his rival was dead di Talmio entertained no doubts; and he now remembered the threat which he had desired Mrs. Pritchard to repeat to Eleanor, and which would be sure to be remembered.

But this was not all.

He had been very outspoken in his sentiments to Florry Trefusis; he had even given her to understand that he meant to meet his rival that night; and, though he did not know this, it was Florry who left that note at Eleanor's house, warning her not to let Mr. Hughes leave it that evening alone.

All this would have been of little consequence if Florry had not seen the condition in which he returned to his lodgings, because a jealous man often utters threats which he would never think of carrying out. But Florry would know that he had carried out his threats.

She suspected it now! She would have no doubt on the matter when she heard of Hugh Darrell's death; and it was quite within the limits of probability that she would give such information to the police as would at once set them upon his track.

He knew that he had not behaved well to Florry, and that while he had accepted her devotion, he had been painfully frank in letting her know that he esteemed Eleanor Rosevear as being as much above her as the heavens are above the earth.

And he had seen the fond, wilful girl wince under his words, and had rather enjoyed the sensation of inflicting pain. But now Florry was avenged.

Before an hour had passed from the time he sat down, first to exult, and then to brood—he had come to the conclusion that his life was in Florry's hands, and that her evidence, if given, as to the time and condition in which he returned to his lodgings that night, would, with what could be gained from other sources, be sufficient to hang him.

He put his two hands up to his neck as he thus thought, and wondered if hanging was a painful death, and muttered, *sotto voce*—

"I would not so much mind being shot—or would rather be disposed of as he was; but to be hanged—ugh! I must escape that, at any price!"

He looked at the clock, thinking he would go to Florry's lodgings and talk with her; sound her, indeed, as to what she meant to do; but the hour was late—too late for her to receive him—and he had to abandon all idea of seeing her until the morning.

Throughout the whole of that night he could not sleep.

The demon of guilty fear had been roused in his heart, and would not be allayed. He thought of flight. But whither could he fly to be out of reach of the arm of the law?

He was wealthy, but his wealth consisted chiefly of houses and lands in his own country—not of portable property, and he was not insane enough to suppose that in concealment, without means at his command, he could earn a sufficient maintenance either by hand or brain.

Then he thought of how he should silence Florry Trefusis, and he quickly concluded that no promise upon her part could be considered satisfactory, because, if placed in the witness-box, the clever lawyers would drag the story out of her.

There were, therefore, but two ways of silencing Florry. One was to hasten her departure from this world—the second was to marry her.

In justice to Victor di Talmio, it must be admitted that he dismissed the idea of ending the life of the woman who loved him, without giving it a second thought.

He could take the life of an enemy, take it treacherously, without giving him a chance to defend himself, because he believed that he had been robbed of a fair woman, who, in truth, had never been his to lose.

But, though passionate and revengeful, he was so tender-hearted that he could not have killed a dog that loved him, still less the woman who had been ready to give up the world for his love!

Yes, this was what his thoughts through that long night brought him to.

He must make Florence Trefusis his wife, because a wife could not give evidence against her husband!

The idea that Florry would refuse to marry him never entered his mind until, having driven to Doctors' Commons, immediately after breakfast, and obtained the necessary licence, he drove to the house in which she lived.

There he was met by the intelligence that Miss Trefusis was too ill to see anybody.

"Be she ill, or be she well, I will see her!" he exclaimed, in a determined tone.

And, disregarding the attempt of the servant to stop him, he went upstairs, wondering, meanwhile, if Florry were really ill, or if she had made up her mind to shun him.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THEY FOUND HIM.

ELEANOR'S indignation against Hugh Darrell for the innocent deception he had practised upon her, soon gave place to anxiety on his behalf, when the servant returned without being able to overtake him.

She read the warning note again, and its language was unmistakable. It was only too clear that the writer believed that the artist's life this night was in danger!

The note was in a woman's hand; a woman had delivered it at the door; and, though Eleanor's mind was above any petty jealousy, she could not help wondering who this woman could be, who knew of Hugh's visit to this house, and who took such an anxious interest in his welfare.

That the source of danger was the Count di Talmio she did not doubt; and yet the suspicion never entered her mind that the anonymous letter was sent by one who was desirous to save the Count quite as much as to save his intended victim.

Whoever the writer of this letter might be, it was quite evident that she knew the artist as Mr. Hughes, not as Hugh Darrell; and this

fact alone made Eleanor feel that another woman loved him besides herself!

Her thoughts, however, never travelled towards Florry Trefusis, and she stood bewildered, not knowing what to do, nor where to send.

Mrs. Pritchard was more alarmed than Eleanor. She remembered the expression of the Count's face when he threatened vengeance upon a more successful suitor, and her only hope was that in the darkness of night the rivals had not met.

But in her present state of anxiety she could not sit down quietly and wait for news, particularly when she knew that Hugh Darrell—as she now delighted to call him—would not come to the house again unless he were sent for; and to Eleanor's surprise she said she would go down to the railway station herself and inquire if a gentleman, answering her description, had gone off by a train soon after nine o'clock.

It was now ten, and as Mrs. Pritchard—accompanied by Mitcham—went out of the well-lighted house into the darkness, a chill seemed to fall upon her heart, as though she were going to meet some great calamity.

She was not to be daunted by this feeling, however, and she closed her lips resolutely and went along her way, the servant keeping close by her side.

They walked in the middle of the road, but they did not meet a single creature until they came to the District Railway Station, and here a drowsy porter answered her questions briefly, and with no satisfactory result.

In turn they tried the Midland and the North-London Stations, for the whole three stand within a few minutes' walk of each other, but the answer was the same in each case—a gentleman answering her description had not been observed, though it could not be said positively that he had not been there.

Why it was, Mrs. Pritchard never remembered, but she resolved to go back to the Midland Station, which lies between the other two, to make further inquiries, and these being unsatisfactory there seemed nothing more to be done but to return home.

"If Miss Rosevear will let me do so, I will take a hansom and drive down to his club in Whitehall, where he is living at present," Mrs. Pritchard mentally decided.

But the step is too decided a one to be taken without reference to Eleanor, and she walks slowly—so preoccupied as to no longer think of the darkness of the night, nor the loneliness of the roads; but from habit rather than from intention she goes down the steep, short slope leading to the path across the field.

"Oh, ma'am, don't let us go this way, it's so dark!" expostulates Mitcham, herself coming to a dead stop. "I can't abide going across a field at night; we might be knocked down and murdered without anybody being the wiser."

Her words are suggestive, and their effect is exactly contrary to that desired by the servant.

Mrs. Pritchard remembers now that Mr. Hughes had been in the habit of crossing this field, and she begins to have a foreboding that if any ill has befallen him, he cannot be very far distant from where she stands.

"Nonsense! There are two of us; what need we fear?" she says, decisively. "It is the nearest way; come along," and she walks on without seeming to doubt that the woman will follow her.

Mitcham comes unwillingly and slowly, lagging well behind and ready to fly at the first intimation of danger.

"And this is New Year's Eve," she mutters, as she goes along, thinking regretfully of the bright fire at home. "I hope I'll never spend another New Year's Eve like this."

The next instant she comes to a standstill, breathless and ready to fly, for a voice, which she does not for the moment recognise, cries wildly,—

"Help! help! help!"

Mitcham is only inclined to help herself,

and has already turned with a strong desire for her own safety when she hears Mrs. Pritchard respond.

"Coming! Where are you? Speak again!" A voice out of the darkness answers, and the waiting-maid recognises the voice as that of her own mistress.

Yes. In Eleanor's heart the struggle between love and pride had lasted but a very short time after Mrs. Pritchard and the servant had left the house, and as might have been anticipated, love soon won the day.

She could not stay quietly in the house while others were seeking for the man she loved.

Personally, she was afraid of no one. Even the Count di Talmio would, in her present frame of mind, have failed to terrify her; and without saying a word to anyone of her intention, she put on her hat and cloak and went out alone to look for him whom little more than an hour ago she had discarded, she believed, for ever.

Instinct, or possibly the habit of walking across this field on the way to the railway station when in Hugh's company, made her go down the footpath, but a fog seemed to be rising from the valley beyond, and she could not see the faintest glimmer of the lights in the road to her left, or in Finchley-road, that lay before her.

This absolute darkness and the muddy condition of the ground made her stray from the pathway, though she was very careful not to lose her way.

Suddenly, without the least warning, she stumbled and fell forward.

Fell upon something large, but round, and to a certain extent soft, and she knew instantaneously that it was the body of a human being.

She sprang to her feet, and tried to ascertain the reason why this man lay here, but her questions were answered only by a faint moan, and she had no means at command to obtain a light.

But she knew intuitively who it was that was lying here, and her heart told her but too truly that it was for her love that he was helpless, and perhaps dying at her feet.

Never since this world began did any woman more bitterly reproach herself for her pride and obstinacy towards the man she loved than did Eleanor Rosevear, as she knelt here in the darkness, afraid to leave him to seek help, yet not knowing how to find it otherwise.

She was growing desperate when the sound of voices, that she thought she recognized, fell upon her ears, and then she cried as loudly as she could for help, until Mrs. Pritchard reached her, followed after a short interval by Mitcham.

The maid was of some use now, for she had a box of wax-matches in her pocket, and as soon as she could be persuaded that she was herself in no personal danger, she produced them.

As the first flash of light fell upon Hugh Darrel's handsome but pallid countenance, Eleanor threw herself upon her knees by his side, and entreated him wildly to forgive her, even to speak to her.

But the white lips were silent, and Mrs. Pritchard, who knew that exposure to the night air might prove fatal, said promptly and even sternly,—

"This is a time for action, not for words. One of us must go to seek assistance at once; which is it to be?"

"You go," replied Eleanor. "He must be taken to my house; lose no time. Send for the gardener and coachman, and get a policeman, if you can. Oh, do make haste! Mitcham must stay with me here; I dare not be alone!"

Mrs. Pritchard was gone before the young lady had finished speaking. It was certain that the grass would not grow under her feet from the pace at which she literally ran to execute her commission.

The time seemed long to the two watchers,

standing in the dark beside the wounded man; but, in point of fact, it was barely ten minutes afterwards before men, carrying lanterns and a door, which had been hastily lifted from its hinges, were seen coming towards them, accompanied by Mrs. Pritchard and a policeman.

A messenger had been sent for a doctor, but had not returned, and the wounded man was lifted tenderly upon the door and carried to Eleanor's house, the policeman and those who did not know to the contrary believing it to be his own home.

By this time more police had arrived upon the scene, and they examined the spot where the struggle had taken place, and found a pool of blood, which must have flowed from the wound.

Mrs. Pritchard was invaluable; she directed everything. She conducted the men who carried their quiet burden to her own room—knowing that it was warm and well-aired—and she kept Eleanor in the background as much as possible, dreading that her name would get into the newspapers.

It was an anxious time until the doctor came, for they dared not examine the wound, and no one ventured to take off his clothing, lest the least disturbance should cause the injured man to bleed to death.

They sent off another messenger, while Eleanor stood by Hugh's side and held his cold hand in her own, and prayed, as she had never prayed, for the life of him who was so dear to her.

At length the surgeon came, and Eleanor was gently, but firmly, led out of the room by Mrs. Pritchard.

"For his sake and for your own it will be best that he shall not see you when he opens his eyes," she says, decisively. "I will come to you directly the wound is dressed. I have linen and everything that the doctor requires."

"But if?—if?" gasps Eleanor.

Her lips refuse to frame the question, "If he must die?"

And Mrs. Pritchard takes it for granted, and she answers tremulously,—

"I will fetch you."

She is herself more than doubtful of the result; but where there is life there is hope, and she is too agitated to dare to trust herself to say more than is absolutely necessary.

From the first moment she had seen him she had liked the man who had saved Eleanor's life, and who now seemed about to pay the penalty of his own life for his love, and she could not banish from her heart a feeling of resentment against the beautiful girl who stood looking at her, weighed down with a trouble which she had helped to create.

Mrs. Pritchard will shield Eleanor from the world, if she can; but she will not shield her from the reproach of her own heart, and now she goes away without expressing one word of sympathy. Her sympathies, indeed, are with him who is lying between life and death, and at whose side two doctors have just arrived.

It would be difficult to say which of the lovers suffered the most—Hugh Darrel, who was roused from his swoon by acute physical pain, or Eleanor Rosevear, who paced about her sumptuous chamber a prey to grief, anxiety, and self-reproach.

As our heroine waited here, and listened for any sound that could come to her from the next room through the half-opened door, she felt at times as though she could bear this agony of suspense no longer, and that she must go in with the doctors and know the worst.

The remembrance of the manner in which she and Hugh had parted that evening alone deterred her.

Her presence by his side—if he recognised her—must excite him, and she might thus deprive him of his last chance of recovery. And so the minutes went by, lengthening out to the best half of an hour, before Mrs. Pritchard joined Eleanor, and said hurriedly,—

"The doctors have dressed the wound, and

say there is just a chance of his recovery; they will not say there is hope. They want us to get a nurse, but I shall sit up with him myself to-night!"

"I shall sit up, too!" said Eleanor, decisively. "I will keep behind a screen if it is necessary; but I will be with him! He belongs to me! If he lives he will be my husband! If he dies I shall never marry!"

Mrs. Pritchard regarded her steadily for a moment, as though she would expostulate, but something in Eleanor's face silenced her, and she offered no further opposition.

She went back to the doctors, however, and took her instructions from them, while Eleanor changed her dinner dress for a soft, warm gown that would make no noise, and in which she could sit or sleep with comfort.

Meanwhile a large folding screen was taken into the sick-room, and so placed that anyone upon the couch would be hidden from the occupant of the bed.

Hugh had been, to a certain extent, conscious while under the hands of the doctors, though nothing more intelligible than half-suppressed groans escaped him; and when the wound was dressed, and they left him, he fell into a deep sleep, from whence it was hoped that he would not wake until morning.

The extent of his wound Eleanor did not ask, and no one volunteered her any information. She knew that his condition was critical, and that absolute quiet was essential; but whether there was any real ground for hope, or grave cause for apprehending the worst, she did not know.

In her own mind there was no doubt whose hand it was that had wounded Hugh; but instead of feeling resentment against the Count di Talmio for committing the crime, she reproached herself for having driven Hugh away from her house so much before his usual time for leaving.

Had she not done this the warning note would have saved him, and he might have been well and happy now, instead of lying there, with a face almost as white as the pillow upon which it rested.

As Eleanor stood and looked at him, her agony of mind was too great to be relieved by tears; and at length, unable to resist the impulse, she bent and kissed the dear lips, which she had thought never to press again.

A radiance, rather than a smile came over the pallid countenance, and the white lips just breathed the word.

"Nell!"

But there was no other sign save the deep, heavy breathing; and she sank on her knees by his side, and wrestled in spirit at the throne of grace, praying in agony that the punishment for her pride should not be greater than she could bear.

And thus the old year died out, and the new year found them. Hugh, hovering between life and death; Eleanor, kneeling and praying by his side, and Mrs. Pritchard seated near the fire, her eyes fixed on the clock on the mantelshelf, the hands of which have just marked the hour of midnight.

"A sad new year for all of us," she muses, sadly; and her eyes involuntarily wander to the sick man's couch, for she knows that the case is as grave as it can be; and, though the doctors allowed it to be inferred that recovery is possible, she, in her heart, believes that it is not so.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARING FOR A WEDDING.

FLORRY TREFURIS had succeeded in making her father glad to purchase her absence from his house, by giving her a small allowance, and tacitly consenting to her going her own way.

The way she did select was not one of which any of her friends could approve, but Florry was as headstrong as the tide of a rushing river, wilful as the winds; and she came to London, took a couple of rooms at the

very top of a shabby but respectable house, and then went in for what she considered an artistic career.

She might ultimately have succeeded in making a moderately good position in the world of Art, for she was undoubtedly clever, and she threw so much intensity of passion into her profession that the figures she painted, and the scenes she depicted, looked real, and life-like, whatever faults there were in the execution of the work.

One day walking up Oxford street, she met the Count di Talmينو, and from that hour, the character of her painting changed; the passion which she had honestly tried to divert to Art had too much personality in it not to go back direct to the man who had given it birth; and the figures on the canvas were flat, tame and lifeless, while the girl's undisciplined heart was filled with rapture, torn with doubt, and then again cast down to the depths of shame and despair.

In the short time that had elapsed, since she came to London, Florence Trefusis had enjoyed and suffered more happiness and misery than is usually spread over the whole life of the majority of women.

Her love trances had been short, and the delusion that Talmينو's heart had really turned from Eleanor to herself was of very short duration; and then all the bitterness of disappointment and the humiliation came to fill her soul with the agony of despair.

Familiarity, where there is no foundation of esteem, quickly breeds contempt, and Talmينو soon threw off all disguise with the woman who adored him, and talked of Eleanor and Hughes, and of his intended revenge, doubting not that the foolish girl would die rather than betray him.

To a certain extent he was right; but she was ready to thwart, though she might not betray him; and hence, knowing that this night he was going to lie in wait for Mr. Hughes as he left Miss Rosevear's house, she hastened on before, having previously disguised herself, and left the note which she hoped would save the artist's life, and warn him of his danger.

How she failed, and how she knew from evidence she could not doubt that the crime was committed, we have already seen, and when Talmينو shut himself in his bedroom, she drew her cloak about her with a shuddering horror, and went back to her own lodgings, feeling numbed and crushed and heart-broken.

She had an Englishwoman's ingrained veneration for justice and respect for the law of the land, and she knew that it was her duty to society, and to the law, to go and denounce the man who had taken or tried to take human life.

Nay more than this, she knew that she made herself an accessory to the crime by silence, and though love sealed her lips, conscience gave her no rest, and sleep for the whole of that night refused to visit her eyelids.

The next morning she was so ill that although she crawled from one room into the next, she could not eat any breakfast, and she lay upon the shabby couch looking at the small miserable fire, her large eyes heavy with unshed tears, and with such a sense of desolation in her soul that words of mine would utterly fail to depict it.

She had told the servant to say she was too ill to see anyone who called but she had not the least idea that Talmينو would pay her a visit.

In point of fact, she thought he would by this time have left England, if he were not arrested in attempting to do so, and despite her horror of his crime, her grief was very great at the thought, that she and he would never meet again.

Her surprise therefore was great, when the Count came into her room without knocking at the door, and she rose to her feet and looked at him with fear expressed in her dilated eyes.

"You here?" she asked in dismay, strongly tinged with terror.

"Yes, *cara bella*, to whom should I come but to you?" he asked, advancing and smiling upon her.

His words and manner would have made her fly to his embrace at any other time, but now she put her two hands over her burning, weary eyes, like one trying to see in the dark, and she asked vaguely and nervously,—

"Was it a dream? Did I see you last night, or have I dreamt it all?"

"Try to think it a dream," he replied gently, "and try to calm yourself; I have something of importance to both of us to say to you."

"But if it was not a dream, why are you here?" she asks in affright. "You ought to have been gone. I thought you had left England. Good heavens! it will be too late and they will take you to prison, they will bring me as a witness against you. I shall die! I shall die with grief and shame!"

She wrings her hands and moans piteously. Her grief seems all the greater to him because it is so tragic and so tearless.

His own peril too faces him more closely.

In the bright sunshine, with no trace of his crime before his eyes, he was beginning to think of it lightly, and the murder of a rival did not set heavily upon his conscience; but Florry's terror was infectious and it required a strong effort at self-command, to enable him to close his teeth firmly and resolve to carry out his previously formed plan, and not draw suspicion towards himself by any attempt at escape.

"Why don't you fly?" demands the girl passionately. "You have not a moment to lose; it may even now be too late!"

"It is too late," he says calmly; "if I had intended to leave England I should have gone last night. But I do not mean to go at present, and when I do go back to my own country, I want you to go with me, Florry."

She makes no answer; a succession of tearless sobs shake her frame, and she sinks upon the couch taking no notice of the hand extended to clasp her own.

This is certainly not the manner in which Count di Talmينو had expected his proposal to be accepted.

True, he meant to marry her to secure his own safety, but he did not want to tell her so; he wished her to believe that it was love for her, mingled with gratitude for the great love which she felt for him, that made him ask her to take his name and share his fortunes.

From a social point of view, the step he was now taking seemed like madness, and he was so fully alive to the extent of the sacrifice he was about to make, that he wished Florry to recognise and protest against it, even while she yields to his will.

But the girl's mind was too deeply imbued with horror of his crime and terror for his safety to have any consideration left for herself. Her overpowering desire was that he should go away and hide himself in some place where the arm of the law could not reach him.

"Florry, have you ceased to love me?" he asks, in his softest, most winning tones.

She looks up suddenly, and asks almost fiercely,—

"Does it look as though I had ceased to love you when I risked recognition to save you from this crime, and when I would now pull down the heavens—were that possible—to shield you from punishment?"

The word "punishment" galls him, but he takes no apparent notice of it, for her assertion that she had tried to save him from the crime alarms him, and he asks, excitedly,—

"What do you mean? From whom did you risk recognition? How could you save me?"

(To be continued.)

One great reason why the work of reformation goes on so slowly is because we all of us begin on our neighbours, and never reach ourselves.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

—30—

CHAPTER XXII.

Now and then Mrs. Clare went over to Dover for shopping, visiting, and a little change, it being only six miles by rail from Folkestone; and it was her whim on these occasions, to go down the Admiralty pier, and watch, with hundreds of others, the arrival of the Calais boat.

She frequently recognised faces, and waved to acquaintances from the upper portion of the pier, actually met them, by appointment, by special admission to the part where the passengers landed, and passed to the train. Of course Mary never saw a face she ever met before; she had no friends to recognise. She went from mere idle curiosity, and of course to keep her *chaperon* company.

Once, and only once, she actually recognised some one.

It was the time that all the officers were hurrying home overland from Egypt, after the defeat of Osman Digma; and as Mrs. Clare gazed down upon the crowd of bronzed and climate worn soldiers, wrapped in ulsters, great coats and plaids, at the usual consignment of "Mossoo" and family of globe-trotting Americans and British tourists, she suddenly heard a slight exclamation beside her, and looking sharply at her charge saw that the lovely rose tint had faded from her cheeks, and that she was literally as white as the chalk cliffs above them.

Mrs. Clare instantly followed the direction of her eyes; they were fixed upon three men—presumably officers—who were walking away. She could only see their backs; one was stout and short, one was middle-sized, one was tall and thin. She could not guess at their ages. They were all well muffled up. One was smoking, and one of those thin men had an extraordinary interest for Mary Darvall!

Oh, if they had only been going the other way, and that she could have seen their faces!

However, she had a slight clue. *He*, whatever his name was, came over in the Calais boat on the twentieth of June, and presumably he was an officer who had been in Egypt. In time Mrs. Clare flattered herself that she would know all about him.

After a while the trains moved off. From where they stood they could not see their occupants; and she and her companion strolled off and had afternoon tea with some friends, and then returned home to Folkestone.

She noticed that she had never in all her experience of her young friend known her to be so silent and so abstracted. She had actually to address her twice before she answered.

No need to ask for the reason of such intense preoccupation—she knew it perfectly well. *He*—whoever he was, and whatever he was to Mary—*he* had come home!

A short time after this little episode, Mrs. Clare and Miss Darvall were invited to stay with Mrs. Seymour at her country place near Canterbury, and accepted the invitation with pleasure, especially Mrs. Clare, who liked variety and the gaieties of a notoriously pleasant country house full of "smart people," as the phrase is nowadays.

She and her young friend started off, taking Carter with them, and a large supply of very pretty frocks, and arrived at "the Court" one afternoon in nice time for afternoon tea.

A carriage and pair had met them at Canterbury, and brought them there in about half-an-hour.

The Court—Rose Court—was an imposing grey mansion standing on the top of a hill, with long avenues leading up to it on either side through a well laid-out demesne. The entrance was almost palatial. A large, carpeted hall about a hundred feet long, furnished like a sitting-room, led to a snug little

bois, where Mrs. Seymour "received," and sat among her court.

She had been abroad all spring, and was charmed to see Mary, and welcomed her most affectionately, and also Mrs. Clare; and soon they were sitting with cups of tea in their hands, forming as much a portion of the party as if they had been there for several days.

They met some old friends, were introduced to strangers, by one and all of whom the beautiful Miss Darvall and her fashionable-looking *chaperon* were extremely well received.

"I was telling you all something just now—what was it?" said Mrs. Seymour to her immediate circle, looking round her.

Part of the company sat near her at a window; some were grouped round a table; one or two young couples—girl and man—were whispering apart, or pretending to look at photos, whilst they were really looking at each other.

"Oh, I have it now!" exclaimed the hostess, with great animation, "I was telling you about my cousin Maxwell—Maxwell Eliot, you know!"

At this juncture Mary set down her untasted tea, for fear her trembling hands might betray her.

"He is such a dear, good, handsome fellow!" specially addressing Mary and one or two girls. "I should like you to know him—you, Mary, especially. Alas! although so eligible, he is not a marrying man. Such a pity! And he is so popular, and has distinguished himself so much in the service! He was an atrocious flirt; but you will all agree with me that that is no great sin."

"And does he not flirt now?" inquired a girl, with interest.

"I cannot say, Lucy—I fancy not; but as he is coming here to-morrow to stop, you will have an opportunity of judging for yourself."

Mary listened as if she were turned to stone.

Coming to-morrow!

"And why does he not marry?" asked Mrs. Clare.

"Aye, why! And he has heaps of money, and such a lovely place!"

"There must be some queer reason?" said the other, suspiciously.

"They say so," lowering her voice. "They say that he is tied to some low creature—that he is married to her. Some say he did it in a moment of pique, but he repented at once. He never sees her, never speaks of her, he loathes her; he never could produce her as his wife, and so he prefers to live alone."

"Is he really married?"

"I am not sure. All I tell you is mere conjecture, and bits of gossip; but I *knew* that before he went to Egypt, two years ago, he made his will, and I told him it was too bad of him not to marry, and that if anything happened to him those odious Conway Greens got Carnfort Park; and he told me that he had not forgotten me, but that I was not to fret, and I asked him who he had left the bulk of his money to, and he said, 'To some one you have never seen; and, as far as I know, have never heard of! When I am dead and gone be good to her, for my sake!'"

"Good gracious. How romantic!"

"And of course it's some odious low creature that worked upon his soft heart when he was a boy. He may not be married to her, after all; but, anyway, it's a great pity, is it not?" turning to Mary.

Mary muttered something inaudible, and her hostess added,—

"And I am quite certain that you will agree with me when you see him. He used to be a little wild, and he always had a shocking temper, but he has such a good heart!"

"I should think his ears must be burning," said a girl, with a laugh. "And I must say I am dying to see him, for you don't often praise people!"

"No; and there's the first bell. We must all run away, and dress for dinner!"

Miss Darvall had ample time for reflection in the privacy of her own room, as Carter, attired her, and dressed her hair.

"Coming to-morrow?" What was she to do?

Make an excuse of sudden illness, and return to Folkestone by the earliest train in the morning? This was the plan that she thought of at first; but as she sat before her own reflection, whilst Carter brushed out her long hair, she came to the conclusion that it would not do.

Mrs. Clare would be bound to accompany her, and nothing short of wild horses would tear that fascinating matron away from her present comfortable quarters.

She would at once see through her feigned illness, and worry, in her own polite, persistent way till she heard the real reasons of her young friend's move.

No; Mrs. Clare just now had come into her room, and in one or two exaggerated sentences had expressed her delight with the people, and the programme for their amusement; to tell her abruptly that she was ill, and obliged to go home would be ridiculous, and would fail to move her once one inch.

"No; I must stay and just take my chance, and let things drift. I am—yes, without vanity—very pretty. I believe I am as well-bred as any of those girls downstairs. I am now his equal in rank and fortune. Perhaps if he were to run away with me again I would go. Life, as it is, is empty and unsatisfactory. I'm like other people, and I am not. If I fell in love with any man, and he with me, I must stifle it at once. It would be a *sin*. I am a married woman, and yet I must go down to my grave virtually an old maid! Then I don't really care about that—at least, I think not. I believe I behaved rather foolishly—badly—the last time we met; I said more than I meant. Yes, no doubt of that, but I was both frightened and angry, and his project was the height of folly. He said he would never see me again," and she smiled to herself. "He little knows that he is going to see me to-morrow! I wonder if he has heard of the change in my affairs, and that I am his neighbour, and Miss Darvall of Danford Place!" And here she put a diamond solitaire in either ear, and gazed at herself admiringly. "He would not have me once—then he repented, and I turned my back on him. This is the third time, the charm; let me see—that is to say, if I like him. If I can win him as Miss Darvall, the heiress—why should I not? I have half-a-dozen admirers as fastidious as he was, only wanting the smallest encouragement to throw themselves at my feet. Of course, my money may have something to say to that! I must not be too vain."

During the evening she was unusually animated; her gaiety was quite infectious, but there was something feverish about it to Mrs. Clare's sharp eye.

In truth, she was trying to brace herself for the morrow, and trying to forget for the moment the ordeal that was in store for her! She sang, and played the guitar; she joined in round games; she looked so lovely, and talked so brilliantly, that she was the cynosure of all the men's eyes, and Captain Durand, whom she had known at Folkestone, sat beside her, and overwhelmed her with his undivided attention.

Next morning came cold reaction, a splitting headache, doubt, trembling anticipation, a desire to fly and hide herself, intermittent with a desire to stay where she was!

The brilliant beauty of the previous evening descended, pale, dull, and heavy-eyed, to breakfast, and asked to be excused from joining the whole party, who were going to a tennis tournament at some distance, and would be absent till dinner-time.

"You will be terribly lonely, dear!" said Mrs. Seymour; "the Berrys and Captain Durand and Mr. Grey, and Colonel Hall, are all playing, so we shall be away the whole day. What will you do?"

"I shall be down, and try and be well when you all come back. I shall read and walk

about the grounds. I shall be very happy. I am used to my own company."

"But you won't have a soul to speak to!" lowering her voice. "Mrs. Clare is bent on going, though I *did* hint—"

"Certainly, she must go," interrupted Mary. "I would not have her lose a day's pleasure on my account for the world."

She literally dreaded *the-d-ttes* with her *chaperon*, especially if that lady happened to be "put out"; and to be debarred from any amusement would ruffle her a good deal—the smiling, elegant, well-dressed Mrs. Clare, that the public knew could be both morose and sulky when she chose.

"You will not have a soul to speak to, my love!" continued her hostess, "not even *Max*, for he is coming down by the night-express, and won't be here till twelve o'clock."

"I don't want any company!" protested her pale guest. "When my head aches I would much rather be alone. Pray don't think of me. Go, dear Mrs. Seymour, and enjoy yourself very much, and let me see that you bring home several prize-winners."

After a short time the landau, private omnibus, and a dog-cart came round and carried away the whole party in the highest spirits—the ladies in their most recent frocks, the men in flannel tennis garb—and Mary ascended to her room with a book, and prepared for a long day alone.

The hours passed very rapidly. A long, dreamless sleep disposed of half-a-dozen; a stroll about the grounds, a cup of tea, and it was actually seven o'clock, and nearly time to dress for dinner—time, at least, to go indoors.

She had picked some lovely roses and a few bits of mignonette with a view to her evening toilette; and as she had been strolling or sitting about the grounds, she was not aware of the arrival of a hired fly.

Captain Eliot, who came earlier than was anticipated, had—an Englishman's first thought, "a tub"—changed his clothes, partaken of a light repast, heard that the whole party were absent with stolid indifference, and had settled himself in a comfortable chair in the library, with a sporting paper for his companion. He sat with his back to the light; the windows were French and opened to the ground, and he presently heard a sound—a light step, as it were, in high-heeled shoes—coming along the flagged terrace; then one of the windows was pushed open—it had been ajar—and a girl entered the room.

She did not see him, as he was almost concealed in a large morocco arm-chair, and tossing her hat down on the table she walked past him to the end of the apartment—to that common goal of both sexes, a looking-glass. She stood with her back to him, deliberately looking at herself, and arranging some flowers in her dress.

He could not see her face, but her figure was most admirable, her head well set on, her hair abundant; there was an air of distinction about her. She was decidedly "somebody." Her dress, which was white and plain, was from no provincial dressmaker, and fitted her slender person like a glove.

For fully three minutes she continued her operations before the mirror, entirely unconscious of anyone's presence, and he looked on from above his newspaper with lazy interest. All at once the girl turned round, and, turning, came face to face with Captain Eliot.

Was he in his senses? The girl could not be. Yes, but it was—Mary Meadows, or rather, Mary Eliot!

She did not observe him for a second, but when he suddenly threw down his paper and rose from his chair she started back, recognised him, and became very pale.

"What is this?" he asked; "is it really you! How do you come here?"

"How do you do?" she replied, with wonderful self-possession, but then she had been prepared for a meeting like this, and he had not.

"I came here by invitation. Mrs. Seymour is a friend of mine."

"How—when did you meet her?"

"At Folkestone. I live there," looking at him gravely.

"Your circumstances have apparently altered a good deal since we met last?" glancing at her dress and her diamonds on her fingers.

"Oh, yes! Won't you sit down?" seating herself. "Have you not heard?"

"I have heard nothing about you," astonished at her manner.

"Not thinking it worth while to inquire?" she added, coolly.

"Exactly! And in the deserts of the Soudan, or in hospital—between which places I have spent the last two years—one is not in the way of hearing of things that interest one, much less those that do not."

"So he is going to keep his word!" she said to herself; "he will have nothing to do with me. We will see about that if he puts me on my mettle," her spirits rising at the thought of the obstacles before her.

"You have not heard that I am not the daughter of John Meadows?"

"Yes; you told me that two years ago."

"But I did not then know who I was," she continued, colouring at the tone of cool contempt. "I am Miss Darvall of Daneford."

"Indeed!"

"You are not surprised?"

"Well, I admit that I am, since you ask me, for I was under the impression that you were Mrs. Eliot of Carnfort Park!"

There was a stinging sarcasm in this speech that sent the blood to her face and tied her tongue, and upset her well-bred composure with a violent shock.

"When was this discovered?" he asked, after a pause.

"About two years ago. It was proved that I was the child of Godfrey Eliot, who died in America."

"Then I was right when I guessed that you had good blood in your veins?"

"Yes, but my mother, who died when I was a baby, was a chorus-singer."

"Indeed! Has the family talent descended to you?" he asked, idly.

"Yes, I have a good voice."

"And what has become of the other Darvalls?"

"Oh, they live on at Daneford. I hate the place, and they are most welcome to stay there."

"And what do they live on?"

"I—I—I share with them."

"Miss Julia Darvall—has she made a great match?—married the duke or earl that her father expected?"

"No," replied Mary, with a blush.

"I suppose the positions are reversed between you now, and you are her patroness?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you live alone at Folkestone, Miss Darvall?"

"No; I have a companion—a *chaperon*—a Mrs. Clara. She is here."

"How comes it that you are alone? I scarcely anticipate that you remained at home to receive me?"

"No, certainly not; you were not expected, and it was only yesterday that I knew you were Mrs. Seymour's cousin, and that you were coming here. Had I known in time—and she hesitated.

"You would have stayed away, and so would I. However, I shall take myself off to-morrow!"

"Do not, pray, on my account," she exclaimed, rather haughtily.

"Oh no, I shall leave entirely on my own! I do not choose to be under the same roof with you."

"You are polite and candid, at any rate," said the lady, colouring with annoyance.

"Yes. You gave me an excellent lesson in politeness and candour that night on Folkestone pier."

"I was wrong. I was rude, I admit. I have been sorry for it since."

"Well, it is rather late to be sorry now."

"It was all my pride."

"And am I to have no pride, or have you an entire monopoly of the article?"

Mary was silent. She pulled a rose to pieces, and then she said,—

"What are we to say to Mrs. Seymour?"

"Say. What do you mean?"

"I mean," speaking with an effort; "is she to know that we have ever met before, or are we to be strangers?"

"Strangers of course, as we are, and ever will be!"

"She knows—she suspects that you are married!"

"The deuce she does!"

"I heard her saying so last evening to—some low creature whom you are ashamed to own."

"Indeed! And who swore she would never own me. Of course she has not the ghost of an idea that this pattern wife is the beautiful Miss Darvall—no more than I had, when I heard some fellows discussing Miss Darvall at the club last night, and talking of her air—her coldness; her face, and her fortune, that they were discussing anyone but the fair Julia. I thought she must be strangely altered, for she was never particularly 'cold,' but I little dreamt that they were criticising you!"

At this moment there was a sound of many footsteps and voices in the hall, and the door opened and Mrs. Seymour looked in.

"Why, Max! so I hear you have arrived!" hurrying over to meet him as he rose, and kissing him as she spoke. "So glad to see you, my dear boy! You look thin, and—brown, and—older; but otherwise not much the worse for having been in the wars," holding him at arms' length as she spoke; then glancing at Mary she said, "Ah, you cannot tell what he was, as you have never seen him before. I'm glad now you stayed at home, Marie, since my cousin came down early. I hope you have been amusing each other, and making one another's acquaintance?"

"I can only speak for myself," said Captain Eliot, with a slight bow in the direction of the young lady. "Miss Darvall has been a most entertaining companion. She has told me all the latest news, and has been kind enough to amuse me for the last half-hour."

There was a latent sting in this speech that cut the listener like the lash of a whip. She bestowed a haughty, angry glance upon Max, unseen by his cousin, and with a murmured excuse left the room, with the air of an outraged princess.

"I'm so glad you have met her, Max, and you seem to have made friends. You were chattering away like anything when we first came in. She is usually rather distant with strangers, but she is a charming girl when you know her, and an immense favourite with me. If there were no drawbacks on your side, she is just the very girl that I should like to see your wife!"

"Just the very sort of girl you would like to see my wife?" he echoed, with a curious laugh. "You are always bent on matchmaking, my dear Sophy, and always thinking of who you can possibly marry me to. Now, I positively assure you, for the hundredth time, that I shall never marry."

"Oh, Max!"

"Yes, and I dare say you have half-a-dozen girls staying here in this house now, all picked out with a view of one or other of them becoming Mrs. Maxwell Eliot, and Miss Darvall for first choice! Is not that pretty near the truth—eh, Sophy?"

"Well, supposing it is," said Mrs. Seymour, with a rather embarrassed laugh; "what is the harm?"

"Then I tell you it's no go—I'll never marry anyone, least of all your new protégée and favourite, Miss Darvall!"

"Can't very well," he muttered to himself, as he obeyed his cousin's hasty injunction to be off and dress. "Can't do what is already accomplished, or marry a girl a second time!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARY DARVALL took unusual pains with her toilette that evening. She was resolved to look her very best, and Carter was quite astonished to find what an interest she evinced in her appearance.

Carter had to dress Mrs. Clara first, and this was a long business, and usually left but little time to spare for Carter's lawful mistress, whom she was surprised to find nearly ready when she appeared.

She wore an exquisitely soft cream satin gown, with square-cut body and elbow sleeves, trimmed with quaint old lace, and diamond pendant at her throat, and several diamond ties in her hair.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Clara, as she rustled in amid a breeze of scent. "You have been getting yourself up. What an age you have been dressing! You will eclipse all!" looking at her with envious criticism.

Now, if her charge had said, "What an age you have been dressing, and you have been getting yourself up," there would have been good grounds to go on.

Mrs. Clara was powdered and painted in a most delicate and artistic manner—almost defying detection. Her eyebrows and her lashes were miracles in their way, so was her hair.

She was dressed in a very handsome crimson satin dress, veiled with black lace, and all the little minutiae of her toilette was beyond cavil. "I want to see if this brooch is straight!" she said, elbowing herself between Mary and the glass—a business she might just as well have arranged in her own room. "I suppose you know that Captain Eliot has come?" still touching herself off, and approaching the mirror.

"Yes; I've met him!"

"Ah—ah!" looking up; "was that the reason you stayed at home to have him all to yourself? Oh, Miss Shylocks!" with affected gaily.

"No; certainly not!" returned Mary, colouring.

"Well, what is he like? I've heard of him often from my darling Charlie. He used to say he was a wild young 'un"—an awful flirt, thought nothing of breaking hearts, and making fools of people; but that among men he was the most generous and best-hearted boy that ever breathed."

"He is not a boy now," said her listener.

"No, he must be twenty-nine or thirty. How time flies! I've heard so much of him, I feel as if I knew him, and that he was quite an old friend. I shall tell him so, too!" smiling admiringly at her handsome reflection.

Undoubtedly, thought her two companions, Mrs. Clara is bent on making a serious conquest.

"I wish, dear Marie, you would lend me one of your diamond bracelets, just to set off my dress! I feel so insignificant beside you. You are so tall, and so superbly dressed, and it looks so odd to see you the unmarried girl, blazing with diamonds, and me, the poor old matron, with nothing but some paltry gold ornaments!"

She seemed to forget that Miss Darvall had thousands a year, and she merely her salary of one hundred pounds, paid quarterly.

"You are quite welcome to the bracelet," said Mary, taking it out of its case as she spoke, and handing it to her.

"Thanks, dearest!" clasping it on. "But you have not told me as yet what Captain Eliot, 'Max' as they called him, is like?"

"You will see him in a minute or two, and be able to judge for yourself, for there is the second gong!"

"Yes; so it is. Wait for me, darling!" hurrying after her into the corridor. "Here, take my arm; we make a good contrast, don't we?" she said, as Mary swept downstairs, and saw themselves in a mirror, half-way down, reflected the whole staircase. "The tall and the short, the dark and the fair, the married and unmarried, matron and maid—"

we won't say the young and the old, dear, will we?"

"Oh, no, of course not!" returned her charge, indifferently.

"People have often taken me for your sister. Who is that?" she whispered, as a gentleman whom they had overtaken stood aside politely to allow them to pass. "Is that Captain Eliot?"

A little nod of assent was her only answer. "My dear, he is divinely good-looking—just the style of all others that I admire. I must try and get Mrs. Seymour to send me in to dinner with him."

And Mrs. Clare gained her point. Mary had the pleasure of sitting exactly opposite to this couple, and noted the unusual vivacity and brightness of her *chaperon*, the little byplay and swift glances she bestowed on her cavalier, the familiar tapping with her fan, the challenge in her eyes.

Mary was at first coldly scornful and disgusted. This was when Captain Eliot was visibly bored and irresponsible; but after a while his old habit came back to him with remarkable ease.

He laughed and talked, answered jest with jest, story with anecdote, glance with glance. They were by far the most animated, mutually-pleased couple at the table, and seemed entirely absorbed in one another.

Captain Eliot had noted with inward amusement his *vis-à-vis* looks of cool contempt at first, and then these looks changed to indignant amazement. Finally, they were averted altogether.

She was jealous, was she? The notion tickled him excessively, and another idea yet more so.

To think that that beautiful, haughty-looking girl opposite, with priceless lace on her dress, ruffles and diamonds in her hair, had once been Mary Meadows, his rustic sweetheart, and that for four years she had been his wife!

It was the first time since the disastrous wedding breakfast that he had sat at table with her; and what a change had come o'er the spirit of the dream in four years!

It was the first time that he and his wife had ever met in company of their own rank; and he thought, as he glanced across at her profile and pose of aristocratic composure, that no sane person would believe that she had ever occupied any social position beneath that of Miss Darvall, the heiress.

"I suppose she thinks I am going to fall in love with this agreeable elderly syren; but I'm not quite such a fool as all that. However, a little flirtation with a lady who is so well able to take care of herself is no harm, and will rouse the lioness of jealousy in Mrs. Eliot's fair bosom. I shall be rather interested to see what she will do."

He was extremely interested, but not agreeably so, in watching the court that was paid to her by several of the men in the house.

When they entered the drawing-room three of them made a palpable race for the seat on the ottoman beside her. It was secured by the most determined of the three, and the two others hung over her from the back, and she talked to them all with strict impartiality.

Meanwhile Mrs. Clare had drawn Captain Eliot aside, to a nook well hidden in the window-curtains.

"Do come here and amuse me!" she cried, "and tell me ever so many things I want to know. We can talk here as much as we like, while those girls murder that overture!"

"What can I tell you, Mrs. Clare?" he asked, taking the proffered place.

"How long are you going to stay?" looking up at him.

"I am not sure."

He had changed his mind about leaving the house the next day.

"I hope you will stay as long as we do."

"You may be sure that I shall."

"Now, tell me. What do you think of my ward?"

"Ward! Mrs. Clare!"

"Well, my charge. Miss Darvall, the heiress."

"I—I scarcely know Miss Darvall."

"She has a romantic story. I suppose you know it?"

He nodded his head.

"She has certainly done wonders for herself, considering all things. She is very well bred, has a good knowledge of French, sings delightfully—you will hear her just now—and has quite the style and air of one accustomed all her life to move, not in the kitchen as she once did (there was a spice of *spite* in this), but in the drawing-room as she does now. Indeed, many well-bred girls have not half her air of distinction and easy, natural manners."

"I suppose good breeding tells in the long run! No doubt yours is an onerous post, the *chaperon* to a handsome heiress."

"In some ways. She is cold and reserved, a sort of girl that you can never get to the bottom of; a girl who keeps her secrets and her thoughts to herself; but she is no trouble in one way. She does not care about man, keeps them all at their distance, snubs some of them quite rudely, and says she will never marry," and Mrs. Clare nodded her head three times.

"Oh! Says she will never marry, does she?"

"Yes! She says as long as men only ask for her hand as a partner to dance with—she is fond of dancing—or as a partner at tennis it's all very well, but another kind of partner she could not endure."

"Then your post is likely to be a tedious one, Mrs. Clare, unless, as is to be hoped, you don't hold such heretical ideas on the subject of marriage." And he looked at her with bold interrogation.

Mrs. Clare smiled, pretended to be a little shocked, and looked down and simpered, and glanced up through her eyelashes.

"Hush!" said some one near them, "Miss Darvall is going to sing."

And so she was, to her guitar and a piano accompaniment. As she stood up beside the instrument before the whole room, every eye was fixed upon her with admiration. The tall, *sovereign* figure, the grace of her pose, with her guitar suspended over her shoulder by its gaudy-scarlet ribbons, made a remarkably striking picture. After a few preliminary chords she began to sing, and what a voice! The lark-like trill, educated to a drawing-room mezzo soprano, it was a clear rich flood of melody that touched all alike, and went straight to the hearers' hearts.

The song she sang was a sad, wild, Creole love song, full of fire and pathos, and with a refrain that dwelt long after in people's ears, whether they would or no.

Captain Eliot listened to her in profound amazement. This accomplishment was not a mere accomplishment in the common acceptance of the term; it was a gift, a talent to entrance a multitude, a fortune in itself. Had she nothing but her voice to recommend her, that alone would exalt her and raise her above the ordinary level of her class; whether of gardener's daughter or great heiress.

Mrs. Clare watched his face of wrapt attention out of the corner of her eyes, and when the buzz of applause was over she said carelessly—

"Sings charmingly. Does she not?"

"Yes," she has what is called 'le voix d'or,' or golden voice."

"She ought to sing, you know. Her mother was a singer—a chorus-singer—a very common person."

"Really! But if she sung like her daughter, she had not a common voice."

"Mary practises a great deal! Of course that goes a long way."

"Of course, practice makes perfect," said her companion, aloud. To himself, "I don't fancy Mrs. C. is very fond of her dear young friend, with all her ecstasies."

The next morning, Mary, who was late for breakfast, found herself sitting next to Cap-

tain Eliot, who acknowledged her good-morning with a very stiff bow, and was wholly taken up with his other neighbour, a pretty little girl with a wonderful fringe.

Previously to her arrival he had noted three letters lying on her plate, and each addressed in a masculine hand. How was he to know that one was from Humpy, one from her lawyer, and one an invitation to a ball at Sherncliffe?

During the morning he strolled about the grounds, at first with his cousin Sophy, and then with Mrs. Clare, who had marked him for her own; and once he came and sat beside her, or walked with her—was as a very octopus, and would not release him for hours.

For two or three days he allowed himself to be monopolised for reasons of his own. He heard a great deal about Mary—(not always to her advantage. Mrs. Clare understood the art of "faint praise")—Mary, whom he avoided, though he watched her pretty closely.

She played tennis with great zeal and ability. She walked about—now with one man, now another. She had a train of respectful admirers. No one was singled out, no one was exceptionally favoured! She drove and danced, and played and sang, and conducted herself much as other girls; and certainly no one would have guessed from her manner that she had ever met Captain Eliot before, or that she was secretly, furiously, jealous of his attentions to Mrs. Clare.

"Better far," she said to herself, "he had gone away, than to sit spooning under the trees, or walking in the moonlight with that bold, detestable woman!"

Three days had elapsed, and he had never spoken to her, which she hoped had not been remarked by others; for among all her conflicting feelings, remorse, wounded vanity, pride, jealousy, was a consuming fear that the outer world guessed that there was some secret between them!

She had made up her mind to treat him to a Roland for his Oliver, and was wondering to which of her admirers she would be unusually gracious—Captain Durand for choice.

Accordingly, that same evening, she walked out in the grounds with him, after dinner, by moonlight. Other couples frequently did the same—her husband and Mrs. Clare for one—but hitherto she had refrained. Now she would do as others did, and amuse herself, and see what would be the result.

So she strolled up and down a long walk, well commanded by the rustic seat, on which reposed Captain Eliot and his companion, and talked and laughed, and made a very good imitation of a *promoué* flirtation.

She also sat in a corner with Captain Durand afterwards, when they had all returned indoors, and refused to play nap or to make herself agreeable to anyone but her present partner on the sofa!

She saw Mrs. Clare staring at her with a gaze of exhaustive surprise. She saw Captain Eliot accord her one long look of steady disapproval, and felt that her Roland was beginning to be felt; but she was exceedingly astonished when, Captain Durand having quitted his seat to fetch her a book of photographs, it was instantly taken by her husband!

"I hope you are enjoying yourself!" he said.

"Immensely! And you?"

"Oh, of course! I've come over to give you a word of advice," lowering his voice.

"Thank you!" rather scornfully.

"It is this!" holding out a volume. "Do not leave your *love-letters* lying about in books; they may be very interesting to you, but they only afford an amusing study to other people."

"Love-letters!" she echoed, blushing scarlet. "What do you mean? I never got one in my life!"

"Then what is this?" suddenly opening the book. "I was looking over this, and came upon it. Luckily for you it was no one else!"

Mary looked and saw an open sheet between



[COULD HE BE IN HIS SENSES?—IT WAS MARY MEADOWS, OR RATHER MARY ELIOT.]

the pages—a few lines she had received two days previously.

"DEAR MARY," it began, "your long letter was most welcome. I miss you more than you would believe, or I would have believed myself. I am counting the days till you come back. Do not stay longer than a week, and, meantime, write as often as possible to your disconsolate

"HORACE."

"I suppose your disconsolate Horace is the gentleman who was good enough to impart instruction to you, and to give you the ten-pound note?"

"What a capital memory you have!" she replied, coolly. "He is one and the same person!"

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself!"

"Ashamed! Why—why should I be ashamed? Shall I tell you who he is?"

"Don't trouble yourself. I know. He is your lover!"

"He is nothing of the sort!" she replied, indignantly. "I had a lover once. I never want another!" looking straight into his angry dark eyes. "He was a wretch!"

"So he was," he acquiesced. "I admit that. There was no defence for him but his temper!"

"He could not have cared a straw for me!"

"Perhaps not. He was a hot-headed young fool!"

Mary was completely taken aback by his style of conversation, and, after a moment, she said,—

"How"—tapping it—"did you know that it was my book?"

"By seeing your name in it. Mary V. Darvall. What is V for?"

"Veronica—my grandmother's."

"What a hideous name!"

"Not worse than Maxwell! But listen to me for one second. That letter is from one of

my very few friends, and from the best of them all!"

"Oh, of course, that is understood!"

"He is an old man—nearly seventy. He has a hump on his back. He was my grandfather's secretary. His name is Horace Montagu."

"By Jove! I remember that there was such a person long ago, when I was a boy, and he used to frighten me, rather, with his bushy eyebrows and his sharp tongue. I did not know that he was still alive."

"Yes; he frightens me, too, now and then; but he is very good to me. It is owing to him and his exertions that I am no longer a gate-keeper at Daneford."

"Instead of an accomplished, well-born, beautiful heiress?"

"Exactly so."

"I suppose you like the change?"

"I do, very much—naturally."

"Where did you pick up Mrs. Clare?"

glancing over at that lady.

"Mr. Montagu—Humpy, as I call him—picked her up. He said I must have a *chaperon*. He settles all my affairs, and really is my best friend."

"How did you first come across him?"

"In the old shell-house, where I ran in for shelter one day. It was there he used to teach me, four times a week."

"I see you are largely indebted to him. May I ask if he knows everything? Does he, for instance, know about me?" looking at her keenly.

"Yes," blushing. "I do not know how he discovered it, but he *does*! He said he remembered you well as a little boy on a white pony."

"So I had a white pony, now that I come to think of it. Egad, I begin to believe you!"

"Begin to believe me, sir!" she exclaimed, rising from her seat with a white face.

"Stay—stay! Listen to me for a moment, Mary. At first I thought it was all a well

got-up story. You see, Horace is a sort of fancy name; the fellow writes a—a young hand, and—and—you are so—well, lovely—so that it seems incredible that you have not a lover, especially as no one knows that you are not free to give your hand to whom you please!"

"I suppose you judge me by what you do yourself, Captain Eliot!" she said, in a withering tone.

"No, I declare! No! I most solemnly swear to you. I have flirted!"—and he paused.

"Oh, yes, you *have* flirted! I can see that for myself!"

"But"—colouring—"I've never really given a serious thought to another woman since that day when John Meadows descended upon us in Carnfort woods!"

"Another woman! But you were only amusing yourself with me then. It was, although I did not know it, play to you and death to me!"

"I really liked you, and was fond of you in my way—as one likes a pretty child. I did not mean to marry you; but I meant you no harm. Nor did I ever, by word, or deed, or look, say or do anything to bring a blush to your face. That is to say"—suddenly correcting himself—"bar a few kisses!"

"Bar a few kisses!" echoed Mrs. Seymour.

"Upon my word, Max, I must look after you. I cannot have you talking to my young friends in this style. Really I am amazed at you—are you not, Mary! What on earth does he mean by 'bar a few kisses'?"

Mary makes no answer whatever, and, turning, walked away.

(To be continued.)

THEY say that trumpet-players are doomed to short lives. We doubt it. We have known men who blew their own trumpets incessantly and achieved good troublesome old age.



[IN ANOTHER MINUTE SIR EDMUND DRAKE WAS IN MID-STREAM WITH ELISE FOR HIS COMPANION.]

NOVELLATE.]

A FORGIVEN SIN.

—30—

CHAPTER I.

A SIREN.

In a gorgeously-furnished drawing-room sat a young girl, with an air of expectancy upon her sweet face.

She was barely in keeping with the amber damask hangings, or the mirror-panelled apartment, with its beautiful statuary grouped in the corners, and its magnificent china, and brilliant colouring, for she was gentle-looking and almost dove-like in appearance, with dark timid gazelle like eyes, and a pale sweet face—so small and slight in form that she seemed lost in the capacious room in which she was sitting.

Dorothy Dunraven was the elder daughter of a rich city merchant—a man who liked to make a goodly show with his money, and to let the world know where he was to be found in it.

Mr. Dunraven never could quite understand his daughter Dorothy, and her retiring ways, her almost quaker-like dresses, of white, and soft greys, and browns, and black, which became her so well.

His wife's handsome costumes of rich silks and laces were quite in accordance with his ideas, and so were the stylish "toilettes" of his younger daughter Elise, who although still a child in years, was a head taller than her elder sister, and looked altogether more of a woman, and a woman of the world.

But Elise was generally at school in France, and it was only during the holidays that Mr. Dunraven could hold her up as a model in dress and manners to his eldest child.

Dorothy, however, paid but little heed to his remarks. She had one of those calm, self-reliant natures which hold strongly to their

own views and opinions, and are far more difficult to turn than the most assertive and blatant.

She said nothing when her dresses were laughed at, being conscious that in reality, they were far more elegant than the more showy ones of her mother and sister.

She always had them from the best milliners; they fitted to perfection, and the soft lace that nestled round her slender throat and wrists was of the rarest.

She took a letter from her pocket and re-read it, then glanced at the splendid white and gold clock on the mantel, and a faint rose hue flickered on her cheeks.

"He is due now!" she whispered to herself, as she went to the window and looked out. "How glad I am to be alone to-day! It was fortunate my mother had started for London before his letter arrived."

The sound of wheels came grating over the gravel, and the rose-hue deepened, that was all.

She did not go out to meet her visitor; indeed, she retired into the room, that he might not see her watching; and although her fingers trembled, she got some needlework out from her work-basket and began to ply her needle, so that Sir Edmund Drake found an apparently very calm little lady awaiting him when he was ushered into the room, but she could not hide the soft glad light in the rarely beautiful eyes, as she raised them to the face of the tall man who was bending towards her.

"Mamma is out, Sir Edmund. Will you mind very much?" she said, shyly.

"Shall I mind very much, Dorothy? Now, do you really believe I shall mind at all? Do you think my visit is to her, or to you, little one?"

She did not attempt to reply to his query, but continued,—

"Mamma had left for London before I heard from you, or I am sure she would not have gone!"

"Are you sorry she had started?" he demanded, taking possession of her hand.

Again she did not reply to him, nor did she release the tiny fingers which were clasped in his.

"I must have an answer, Dorothy!" and he passed his arm around her waist, and raised her face to his with his hand, as though she were a child.

"Dorothy! Confess—were you sorry?"

"No!"

"That is honest. I like an honest woman who will tell the truth—and now another confession. Are you glad to see me?"

"Yes! I think I am, a little," she returned, with a mischievous flash from the soft eyes.

"A little!" he echoed, in a tone of reproach. "That is not honest at all. I retract my former praise, unless you deserve it better. And now that I am here, and we are alone, and you are just a little glad to see me, what shall we talk about, small Dorothy?"

"How should I know? How can I possibly tell?"

"Oh, you have not pictured our meeting, then, at all? Have not wondered what I had to say to you to bring me so far?"

"Not much," she faltered, slipping from his arms, and perching herself upon the sofa.

"You don't like me to touch you, then?"

"No; it is treading me rather like a child to hold my face up like that."

He laughed heartily.

"Dorothy, how long have you posed for being so very grown up? There is not much of you, even now."

"I cannot help being small," she replied, with a flush; "but surely, Sir Edmund, you did not come all this way to laugh at the size of my stature!"

"No, dear! I am laughing at your dignity."

"It is out of place, perhaps, but it is a part of my nature to be reserved. I do not think dignity is the right name for it."

"Well, we won't quarrel about it, child. What has mamma gone to London for?"

"To do some shopping and to meet Elise, who is coming home for a month. They will not return till to-morrow night."

"I have never seen your sister. Is she like you?"

"Not a bit. She is a fine girl, and will be a beautiful woman, but she is barely fifteen now. Elise would not appreciate being considered like me at all."

"And yet you are the sweetest child on earth!"

"I am not a child! I am eighteen. I wish you would not treat me as though I were eight instead!"

"Very well, Dorothy. Darling—will you be my wife? Now, is that treating you as a woman?" and he caught her by both her hands and held her captive.

"Now you are laughing at me!"

"Not so, sweetheart. It is that I have come all this way to say to you, dear, Dorothy, I am so very, very fond of you! Have you not often been sure of it without any words of mine?"

"I have thought sometimes that you liked me—a little."

"And were you glad?"

"I think so."

"Do you only think so, dear? Have you not felt sure?"

"How could I, till you told me?"

"I believe one can, with all your reserve, small Dorothy. I have felt quite certain of your love for me!"

"That was conceited," she returned, smiling at him. "Girls don't give away their affection until they are asked for it. I must deny the soft impeachment."

"Nonsense! Eyes and voice and hands are traitors, and betray you when you least guess it. Little Dorothy, you will never love any other man as you love me. Come, tell the truth! Own it, dear, and make me happy!"

He drew her near to him as he spoke, and a bright smile settled about her mouth.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, softly, and he gathered her within his arms, while she nestled there confidently.

"Did you know I had come to tell you this?"

"I thought so!"

"Ah, I have caught you! You had thought about it, then?"

"Yes."

"Little one, I must punish you for telling stories," and he kissed her again and again.

"Is that how you will always punish me for doing wrong, Sir Edmund?"

"Sir! Now Dorothy, what do you deserve?"

"Edmund, then."

"Yes, I shall always kiss you when you are troublesome."

"Then I shall be naughty very often!" she laughed; and he caught her in his arms again, to punish her in his own fashion, when the door opened, and Mr. Dunraven stood in the room regarding them, and with an ostentatious cough he announced his presence.

"Oh, papa! I did not expect you home," said Dorothy, her face ablaze.

"So it seems, my dear! Sir Edmund, I shall be happy to see you in the library," and he offered his hand to the Baronet.

"Pretty place this of mine; you have not been here before! Nothing like the Thames to my mind; near London, and quite away from it. Bucks is one of the prettiest counties in England. Find me such a piece of wood as the Burnham Beeches anywhere else, and I'll go a hundred miles to see it! We have all the advantages of river, country, and London all rolled into one. Hollo! what's become of Dorothy? She has belted!"

"I daresay she felt a little shy at your coming in so unexpectedly just now."

"And catching you, eh? Well! what does it all mean, Drake?"

"It merely means that I have asked your daughter to be my wife, Mr. Dunraven, and I hope you will consent to our union."

"The girl is too young. I couldn't let a daughter of mine marry till she is twenty-on."

And the merchant thrust his hands into his pockets, as though he found that decision in their very depths.

"Three years is a long time to wait, but it will come to an end some day," returned the Baronet.

"Just so; and as to means, you can afford to keep her, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! I can afford to keep her; but not in a home of luxury like this."

"In fact, you want money with her?"

"For her sake, yes. But I would marry her without a penny; she is such a gentle, unique girl."

"Unique! ha, ha! You aristocrats have a wonderful way of expressing yourselves, but I don't know but what you are right. Dorothy is one standing alone. I have never seen anyone like her. Her sister will have more style, but Dorothy is as good as gold; the sort of stuff the old martyrs were made of. You can't turn her a quarter of an inch, if she has made up her mind a thing is right."

"I have known her some time, and have watched her narrowly. I am certain she is a good true girl, and will make a good, true wife."

Mr. Dunraven's weak point was his daughters; and he now administered a hearty slap on the Baronet's back.

"There! there! We shan't quarrel about the money! See, the girl is standing by the riverside feeding the swans. You would like to join her, I daresay. Where is your portmanteau?"

"In London."

"Then telegraph for it to be sent down. Mrs. Dunraven won't be home till to-morrow night, and you must ask her consent as well as mine."

Nothing loth, the Baronet did as he was desired, and in a short space of time he joined Dorothy by the river's brink, where the royal swans were gathered around her, expecting bread from her white hands, and she stood by the drooping boughs of the tender green willow trees, which bent so gracefully to the running stream, kissing it coquettishly when swayed by the wind's gentle touch.

It was a very happy afternoon to both the lovers.

Mr. Dunraven had business to attend to, and suggested that Sir Edmund should row his daughter down the river.

And then, the wind freshening, they put up a white sail and ran before it, while they sat side by side, the girl nestling to him with confidence.

"How quiet it seems, just as if you and I were alone in the world, little Dorothy! Do you enjoy it, sweet one?"

"Yes, I am very happy," she replied softly.

"I never knew how lovely the river was until to-day."

"Wait till I take you into society dear. You will have plenty to enjoy then?"

"I would rather be here, Edmund, far rather, with only you and the beauties of nature around us. Elise is always longing to be in the gay world, but I shrink from it. It seems so shallow, such glare and glitter, with no reality. I came out last season, you know, and I did dislike it so much."

"But, my dear girl, delightful as this is, one could not spend one's life just drifting down the river with the aid of white wings; there will be heavy streams to pull against, storms to breast, and one must have some amusement to counterbalance the ills of life."

"To be alone with you, and quiet like this, would suit me better than ever such a brilliant assemblage, dear," she said, gently.

He stooped and kissed her, not because he agreed with her sentiment, but because the eyes she raised to his were inexpressibly lovely, filled with soft, glad light.

"Well, child, we can come on the river to please you, and go into society too, to please me. Now that is a bargain, is it not, Dorothy?"

He took her hand into his own and she left it there, and so they sailed on, happy in the present, with no thought of evil in the future.

They returned in proper time for dinner; and Sir Edmund, being both a good talker and a good listener, got on famously with Mr. Dunraven, who, being somewhat egotistical, required a hearer with plenty of patience, who knew when to join in, and when to be silent, so they agreed well together.

The next morning proved beautiful, and again the lovers started in the boat, this time taking their luncheon with them, and another happy day was passed.

When they reached home a tall girl was standing upon the lawn looking out for them.

"Who is she?" asked the Baronet, turning to Dorothy; "what a beautiful girl!"

"That is Elise! Yes, she is very pretty."

"Elise! why, I thought she was a child!" and he let his eyes rest upon her admiringly, a fact she was not slow to note, for Elise Dunraven was a born flirt and coquette.

"Oh! my brown mouse!" she cried, mischievously, "so, quiet as you are, you can go off to play when the cat is away!"

"Meaning whom, Elise?"

"Why, mamma, of course. Have you had a jolly time, old girl, while I have been conjugating verbs?"

"Elise," said Dorothy, quietly, "let me introduce you to Sir Edmund Drake."

"I don't think I have heard of you," returned the girl, "unless you are one of the friends Dorothy made in Scotland last autumn; but she is so close, she never tells us about her fun, however much she has; but she doesn't look as if she gets much; now, does she, Sir Edmund?" Is she not a demure mouse? And don't you think my name for her just suits her? I can imagine her curling herself in a ball for the winter, in the middle of moss and cotton-wool," and Elise threw her arms round her sister, and gave her a hug.

"It would never do if we all made as much noise in the world as you, Sisie; it would be quite a tower of Babel!"

"Not if we all talked one language, stupid!" laughed the girl, jumping into the boat.

"Now it is my turn to have some fun! Come, Sir Edmund, pull me up to the look and back, and I will bless you."

The Baronet looked at his fiancée, but before she could speak Elise had raised two sparkling dark eyes to his, full of mischief and invitation.

"You must come. Dorothy has had her share of you, and, besides, mother is waiting for her. She is in for a scolding, I suppose, as father and mother had a private and confidential, and then mother desired me to tell Dorothy to go to her directly she came home. You'll catch it for going off boasting, I expect. Jump in, Sir Edmund. If I get into a scrape too it will come all the lighter for Mousie."

In another minute Sir Edmund Drake was in mid-stream, with Elise for his companion. Dorothy was watching them from the bank.

He had not wanted to leave his love, but Elise had drawn him away almost against his will, and the bright *espiègle* face before him soon made him forget his desertion of her.

"Have you been out long with the mouse?" she asked, presently. "You had rather a slow time of it, hadn't you? There isn't a bit of fun in Dorothy, and I don't think she knows how to flirt."

"I don't think the same can be said of her younger sister," returned Sir Edmund, laughing.

"I! Oh! yes! I flirt! Why shouldn't I?" "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't; in the present company, at any rate," he laughed.

"That's a challenge!" cried Elise. "Oh! I am sure we shall get on famously! Here's the lock. What's the use of going back yet? There is plenty of time before dinner! We may as well go on."

"What about Dorothy?" he said, hesitatingly.

"Oh! don't fret about her; she'll amuse herself, she always does. No one ever troubles about her; she is always contented. She will sit a whole day at her work, with the rain beating against the window-panes, as cheerful as a cricket, without a word of complaint; and I feel inclined to break all the furniture. It fidgets me to be caged up. Ugh! how slimy the sides of the lock are. Give me the boat-hook to hold on. Girls look awfully nice holding on like this; quite picturesque; now, don't they?"

He raised his eyes to look at her, and was struck anew with her beauty.

The tall, slight figure was willowy and lissom, and was shown off to advantage by the position in which she was standing, while the stylish Parisian costume of sage green and pale blue was most uncommon-looking with ribbons of the same colours hanging from her left shoulder, and the looping of her skirt; a white sailor-hat, trimmed with pale blue, covered the glossy dark brown hair, which peeped beneath the brim in soft curls, looking doubly dark against the pure white skin.

The laughing brown eyes were looking down on him, seeking his admiration, and the pretty red lips were apart, showing her pearly-white and even teeth; the nose was snaky, and inclined to be tip-tilted, but was only sufficiently so as to give expression to the bright face—a face upon which no line of care, or even thought, could be traced.

Her naturally beautiful colour was now brightened by the excitement of the fun, and she would have made a perfect model for a Juliet at that moment, and there are few men who would not have wished to pose for her Romeo. Certainly Sir Edmund Drake was not one of that small number.

"How far shall we go up?" she asked, laughing.

"I am your slave to command!" he replied.

"But I expect you would want to be king, too. You know the poem of 'King and Slave,' don't you?" and she began to quote in far from a bad style; then she suddenly broke off. "I say, wouldn't it be fun not to go home to dinner?"

"Great fun; but I think we must go, for all that."

"Oh, you are a nasty fellow! If I am game to get into a row, you might be!" and the rosy mouth was drawn into a veritable pout.

"You look prettier when you smile, Elise."

"Oh, you do think me pretty, then?" she asked, with conscious vanity, and the pout vanished.

"Yes, you are very pretty!" and the look which he gave her sent the hot blood coursing over neck and brow.

To deliver justice, Elise Dunraven had not the faintest idea that this man with whom she was amusing herself was engaged to her sister, or that there was anything between them.

That Dorothy should even have an admirer was a thing she had never considered possible. Dorothy always was so quiet and gentle that the idea of her captivating a handsome Baronet never once entered the girl's head.

As to that Baronet himself, his senses were enchained by this siren—for the time being, at any rate—even though he was not ready to acknowledge the fact.

"Which do you really prefer, me or dinner?" she asked, with a thoughtful look. "I would rather stay out here than go home."

"So would I; but we have no choice in the matter."

"Why not? Who is your master?"

"The force of circumstances and the usages of society."

"Gracious, what a well-turned phrase! Let us have it in plain English."

"I am a visitor at your father's house, and invited by him to dine with his family at a certain hour. If I absent myself he would have deep reason to be annoyed, and he would never ask me again. Do you wish that, Elise?"

"No."

"Then we must go home, and that at once."

"Very well."

There was silence between them, but at length he broke it.

"Elise, you are cross!"

"Why do you call me Elise?"

"Because it is a charming name, and you are a charming girl—that is, when you are good-tempered. I don't know what you may be at other times."

"Do you call all girls by their Christian names?"

"Certainly not. Only when we are very intimate, or I like them very much!"

"Well, you must like me very much, then; for we can't be very intimate, as we only met to-day!" and she smiled at him.

"I'm glad to see the sunshine again, Elise. Yes, I do like you, greatly! You don't object to my calling you Elise, do you?"

"Shall I tell the truth?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I like it!" and once more she relapsed into silence, and even thoughtfulness, for her.

"A penny for your thoughts."

"They're not worth it!" she retorted. "I was thinking of you!"

"Of me?"

"Yes; I was envying you!"

"Why?"

"Because I hate my life so! You have freedom; you can go where you like, and do what you like, and no one can say a word to you. I have always to obey someone, or get punished for it! Fancy punishing anyone of my size! It does seem absurd, does it not? But if I don't please Madame Pigeard I have a task set me to learn, or say, or I am ordered to stand at breakfast, or some other humiliating nonsense. I tell you it maddens me! I have too much spirit to put up with it. Some day I shall run away, and that will be the end of it!"

"Alone, Elise?"

She blushed hotly.

"I didn't mean anything of that sort; but I might do even that if I were tempted," she added, with a laugh. "I am miserable at school, and I long so to see the world untrammelled!"

"A woman can never be quite untrammelled. But how I should like taking you into the world with me! You would know how to enjoy it; would you not, Elise?"

"I should, indeed. Tell me about it, Sir Edmund. I love having someone to tell me about all the gay sights and scenes. Dorothy says she can see nothing in them to enjoy, so you may guess her descriptions are not very graphic!"

"Poor Dorothy!" he said, regretfully. "She has a gentle nature. She is a dear, good girl!"

"No doubt of that." Then she added, saucily, letting the water ripple over her long white fingers, "Do you like good things, Sir Edmund? I think they are awfully insipid!"

He caught the tempting white hand, and let the boat drift.

"You are a siren!" he whispered, "and would tempt St. Anthony himself!"

"Are you at all like him, do you think?" she inquired, innocently.

"In appearance or morals?" he laughed.

"In neither, I should say!" she responded, laughing too. "You wouldn't even try to attend to your book if a pretty girl came by, but would turn down the page, to save trouble, and call her by her Christian name to come to you!"

"Oh Elise, Elise! A woman with two bright eyes in the worstest devil of all."

"The present company always excepted, of course. I'm not a devil, now, am I?" and she raised her bright eyes to his, flashing with mischief.

"I do not know," he said, releasing her hand, and did not speak again till the boat

touched the camp-shedding beside the Riverdale Lawn.

He turned his eyes to right and left, but no one was in sight.

Dorothy was not watching for him.

He had fancied that she would have waited to welcome him home, and he was disappointed.

"You have not been a very pleasant companion for the last ten minutes," said the girl, as she rose to leave the boat. "Who is cross now, I should like to know, and what is it all about?"

It was simply that a little prick of conscience had made him rough to her, because she had led him into forgetting Dorothy. But now it seemed Dorothy was not thinking much of him either, and he put conscience aside.

"I am afraid I was charlish, Elise; but you will forgive me, won't you?"

"Rather! I think you are ever so nice!"

"Then we shall be friends, shall we not?"

"Do you mean real friends?"

"Yes! here's my hand upon it."

She clasped his hand with a lingering pressure.

"I'm so glad!" she said softly; and springing on shore she ran swiftly over the lawn, leaving him alone in surprise.

"Why did she go off like that?" he queried with a sense of disappointment, for somehow he was expecting some pleasant last words with her before going in.

He walked to the house, and seeing Dorothy sitting in the drawing-room, reading, he entered that way.

"You were not watching for us, Dorothy?" he said, with a touch of reproach in his voice.

"No," she answered calmly, raising her eyes to his face; "I could not tell when you would return."

How impassive she was! how different from her sister Elise!

"You have only ten minutes to dress for dinner, Edmund, and papa is very punctual."

"Very well. What did your mother say, Dora?"

"She was very kind."

"That is right. Then she will give us her blessing?"

"I am sure she will. Where is Elise?"

"She ran in as soon as we touched land."

"You went farther than you intended, did you not? Do you know you have been away these three hours, Edmund?"

"No! Was it so long? Elise is amusing, and the time passed pleasantly."

A faint colour flickered to her cheek; there was a slight quiver of the sensitive mouth; the large eyes dilated as with a sudden fear.

She loved this man so deeply, and his words jarred on her.

He did not notice these signs of her suffering, for she dropped her eyes over her book; and he had turned, chilled by her apparent want of interest, to the door.

"It would kill me if I lost him now—if he could be untrue," she murmured when alone; "but it is impossible. Elise is but a child; and oh! I know he is true! It is only because I love him so dearly that I grudge him even to Elise." And the tears stood in Dorothy's soft, dark eyes, and quivered in her long lashes.

CHAPTER II.

A NOCTURNAL INTERVIEW.

WHEN Sir Edmund Drake came down the gong had already sounded for dinner, so there was neither time nor opportunity for any words, loving or otherwise, with his fiancée.

Dorothy was very quiet all the evening, but Elise was brilliant, keeping the party alive with her sallies, and witty sayings.

Mr. Dunraven always had been proud of his precocious young daughter, and now he was simply delighted with her, and gave way to peals of merriment at her jokes.

"It's a pity I hadn't sent you to France too, Dorothy, my dear," he said; "perhaps they would have knocked some fun into you."

"Dorothy has something better than fun in her, papa!" said Mrs. Dunraven, in a vexed tone. "No one could have a better daughter."

"That is true, my dear, quite true," returned Mr. Dunraven, apologetically. "There never was a better girl; and now, mamma, what will you say to me? I have been in mischief. I've made up a pic-nic for to-morrow, to Burnham Beeches, to show Sir Edmund what our trees are like."

"That will be jolly!" cried Elise. "I am so glad you dear old dad; you're one of the right sort, and one day we must have a steam launch up to Oxford. We may, mayn't we?"

"Of course my dear, and I'll join you if I can. If I can't, why you will get on very well without me."

"Wait and fix a day when you can come, father. We should not enjoy ourselves without you half so much," said Dorothy, laying her hand on her father's.

"There's a compliment to you, Drake. Never mind, she will tell you a different story when I'm not present," and Mr. Dunraven laughed at his own joke.

Elise cast a swift glance at her sister, and on to Sir Edmund, which was not lost on the latter.

"She must be told of our engagement," he decided, and went on talking to Mr. Dunraven.

"Then we start at eleven to-morrow," said Elise, "and meet our friends at the entrance of the wood. I hope you have ordered a good spread, papa? That is half the battle. A fine day, a jolly lunch, and a pleasant companion! Fancy if one got paired off with some stick, whose only polish was on his boots!"

"Oh! I'll find you a nice little lad to flirt with!" laughed her father.

"Thank you! I am capable of finding some one for myself," retorted Elise. "A nice little lad of your choosing would not suit me at all."

"Ha, ha! The peas grow above the sticks in France, Miss Elise; you mean to keep us all in order, I declare. Drake, you would have found that girl a handful, I can tell you," and Mr. Dunraven laughed heartily.

Again the girl glanced at him sharply.

"Elise and I are very good friends, are we not?" and he turned to her in a kindly manner.

She gave him a grateful look, and Dorothy raised her eyes just in time to see it, and a pain shot through her heart, but she made no sign, and was quieter than ever.

"Will you walk round the garden, Dorothy?" asked her lover, leaning over her chair, as they entered the drawing-room; "the moon is out, and the stars are bright—it is a lovely night!"

She rose at once.

"Will you not have your hat?"

"No, thanks; I shall not take cold."

They went out side by side, and he drew her hand within his arm.

"You are very quiet to-night, sweetheart?" he said gently, as he pressed her more closely to his side.

"Am I? Well, perhaps I am; but I am generally quiet, Edmund. Elise puts me quite in the shade, does she not?"

"I should say she is a very clever girl, and she is really beautiful when she is animated. In a couple of years' time there will not be a girl in London to compete with her. Elise will be the belle of the season!"

"She has improved in appearance since last she was home."

"Does Elise know of our engagement, Dora?"

"No, I think not. Why?"

"Oh! I can't give a reason; but I should like her to know."

"Of course I shall tell her when I get the chance."

"All right, dear. Tell her to-night that I am to be her brother."

"Very well, I will."

So when she retired to her room that night she drew her younger sister with her.

"Well, Sisse, darling, I am very glad to have you home," she said kindly.

"You can't be so glad as I am, Mousey; you have never been to school in a foreign country."

"No, but I don't suppose it is any worse than being at school in England, and now tell me, Sisse. How do you like Sir Edmund?"

"Oh, Dorothy! he's a dear! Why did you never tell me about him? He is handsome, and no mistake."

"Yes! he is, Sisse; but I didn't like to talk of him till I was quite—quite sure."

"Sure. Sure of what?"

"That he loved me."

"My dear Dorothy, what are you talking about? Sir Edmund is the last man to think of a small brown mouse like you. He wants a girl to make a show in the world and to do him credit in society—a girl of my stamp, Mousey."

"Don't—don't run on so, Sisse, dear," returned Dorothy, with a look of pain. "Sir Edmund has asked me to be his wife."

"You! Nonsense, Dorothy; you are joking!"

"I never was more serious."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are engaged to Sir Edmund Drake?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Good-night, Dorothy."

"You have not wished me happiness, Sisse?"

"I can't."

"Why?"

"You are not suited. You will both be miserable; you will never satisfy him, and he will flirt with other girls under your very nose."

"Elise!"

"Well, I won't say any more, but I can't congratulate you; indeed I can't."

"You can wish me joy?"

"Oh, yes! I can wish it, and I do wish it, Dorothy, but I am very—very sorry."

"And I am very, very glad. Good-night, Elise, Heaven bless you."

She turned into her room and shut the door gently, while the younger girl sped swiftly down the stairs and out into the garden, with a great sob rising from her heart to her lips.

There was in the grounds a retired nook with a cosy seat overhung with Virginian creepers, and jasmine and ivy, out of the usual garden traffic, and to this spot Elise rushed, blindly, and, throwing herself upon the seat, gave vent to a passionate fit of weeping, and there Sir Edmund Drake found her, not by intent, but by one of those unlucky chances which so strangely alter our lives.

He was quietly smoking his pipe of peace before retiring for the night when sounds of distress met his ears, and, shaping his course to find out the meaning of them, he came upon the weeping girl.

Now, tears from a woman were a sight Sir Edmund could not stand up against.

When Dorothy had left him with the promise to tell Elise of their engagement he had felt greatly relieved. He had, he knew, been foolish, and he was glad that his real place in the house should now be known to all.

He was really fond of Dorothy in a good, steady way, and firmly believed in finding happiness by her side.

Still, like many other men, he was weak where the fair sex were concerned, and he acknowledged to himself that Elise and her witching ways had made him for the moment forget his allegiance to her sister, and he was desirous that it should not happen again.

But when he saw the girl, half-lying, half-sitting, all in a troubled heap, his compassion was stirred.

"Elise, my dear child, what is it? What is your grief? Can I help you?"

Not a word in reply, only the sobbing was

stifled and muffled, as by a violent effort. He seated himself beside her, and placed his arm protectingly about her.

She knew the truth now; she could in no way mistake him; it would be unmanly not to strive to comfort her.

"Who has vexed you, Elise?"

She raised her beautiful tear-stained face to his, all white in the moonlight.

"Why did you pretend to like me so much? Why did you ask me to be real friends with you? I will never believe in any one again; and I did in you—very, very much."

"Believe in me still, Elise. I do like you—more than like you."

Was he mad? But an hour ago he had parted from Dorothy, full of faith in her and in himself.

Now, with his arm about Elise's slim waist, and the girl's beautiful face so near his own, and the knowledge that her grief was all for him—such grief as he could not imagine from his fiancée—he lost his head completely.

"Do you mean that?" she asked, tremulously, fixing her eyes on his, while her bosom rose and fell with agitation. "Then why are you engaged to Dorothy?"

"Hush, Elise, darling! Do not let us speak of her. Remember, I had asked her before I had ever seen you; and even now, what do you know of me? You think you like me because you have seen nothing of society—that is all. When you grow older you will find there are plenty of better fellows in the world than Edmund Drake."

He drew her to him, and her only answer was to cling to him as though he were dearer to her than life.

"Child!—child! what can I do for you?" he said, his senses responding passionately to her touch; and he kissed the fair face again and again, guiltily, with the knowledge of the wrong thing he was doing, but without the strength of mind to resist self.

"Darling, do you love me so much?" he whispered, holding her close to him, and for reply she caressed his face as a child might do.

The action recalled to him her youth, and he smiled at her.

"Elise, in a few years' time you will laugh at what you think a trouble to-night, and will perhaps blame me for this interview."

"Do you love Dorothy like this?" she inquired, suddenly.

Her arms were about his neck, her cheek was against his, and he could hear her young heart beating wildly.

"No, Elise, not like this!"

"Then you are mine, not hers," she cried, triumphantly, and kissed him of her free will.

A window opened in the house, and Dorothy, dressed in white, with her dark hair around her shoulders, looked out into the night, unconscious of her lover's and her sister's treachery.

One glance at that sweet calm face had stilled his mad passion more than a dozen sermons could have done, and made him ashamed.

"Hush, Elise! For Heaven's sake, be still!"

"I do not mind if she does hear us."

"I do!"

The blind was drawn quietly down, and the sweet face disappeared.

"Good-night, Elise," said Sir Edmund, gently. "Go to bed, child, and forget me if you can!"

But Elise could not forget him. He should have taken a very different course with her if he desired that.

Young and romantic, this first fancy seemed to her a love which must last a lifetime. Flattered by his admiration, attracted by his manly beauty, her very youth, which had so far shielded her from men's attentions, now became her greatest danger, and caused her to speak and act as she would have blushed to do had womanhood been more strongly developed in her.

Too young to care to hide her feelings behind a barrier of maidenly reserve, yet old enough to be carried completely away by a passionate longing to possess what she craved for, at any price.

Taught a lot of sentimental nonsense by her Parisian schoolfellows, and unable to judge for herself the path of honour and the duties of life, Elise allowed her feelings to sway her actions, and instead of trying to forget him, she lay tossing restlessly on her bed, thinking of the man she supposed she loved; of his flattering words, of his claspings arms, and his passionate kisses. Was it likely that such a girl as Elise would forget him?

She thought of him all through the night, only falling into restless slumber as the sun-god touched the heavens with his rosy hand, while Dorothy, with a murmured prayer for his happiness, slept as peacefully as an infant, and, awaking with the birds, like them sang, while she dressed in a soft white costume, and was beside the river feeding her favourites by the time her lover looked out into the day and saw her there.

Her lover! Was he her lover?

She, at any rate, had no doubt upon the subject. Her faith in him would take a good deal of breaking, and as yet she knew nothing.

How pure and child-like she looked, her garb as white as the swans themselves! A pang of deep remorse shot through the man's heart as he watched her.

He felt that this girl aroused the best part of his nature. Elise the worst. Yet even while he thought of her his pulses throbbed with the remembrance of their clandestine meeting.

Alas! stolen apples ever were the sweetest!

He dressed himself quickly, and, coming up behind her over the mossy lawn, touched her lightly.

She started a little, but quickly hid the fact that he had startled her, and smiled.

"You are out early, Dora?"

"Yes, I like the morning air; it seems sweeter than any other time of day. I like you to call me Dora, because no one else does!" and she passed her hand confidently through his arm.

"That is right, sweetheart; I find it pleasant when you like what I do. I wonder what you would say, little Dora, if I did anything of which you disapproved greatly?"

"Not much, Edmund. The more I felt the less I should say, perhaps."

"Stern silence would be the hardest of all to bear, dearest!"

"Well, we need not settle how I should bear such a trial," she laughed. "I suppose you do not mean to behave very badly to me, do you, dear?"

"No, indeed, Dora; men seldom mean to do wrong, yet somehow I fear we often do it!" She looked up at him with a bright glance of perfect confidence.

"I am not much afraid, Edmund. I am willing to trust my happiness in your hands!"

He could not meet her gaze, but turned and caught roughly at a flower, and shattered it.

"Poor flower!" she said, as its leaves fell at their feet. "What had it done to vex you, Edmund?"

"It was wanton of me to destroy its beauty, was it not? We men are not too perfect, Dora; I know I am not. But a woman's love can work wonders, and perhaps my white dove may make something good of me yet, if only she will try. Dora, I feel that your influence over me is a holy one. Try and keep me straight!"

"I don't think it will need much effort on my part, Edmund. These faults are only visible to your own eyes."

"You do not know, Dora."

"Do I not? Then tell me, love."

"Tell you," he laughed, uneasily. "No, little one, I cannot scare you with harrowing details; but I have not always been quite so good as I might have been, I fear."

"Which of us have?"

"You, at any rate, Dora."

"Oh! I don't know about that! Our temptations may not have been of the same sort, but I have often done very wrong."

He smiled at her amusedly.

"Your blackest sin would be white compared to mine, Dora. We men don't live very good lives."

"Do not say that, dear!" she said, a look of pain crossing her sweet face. "If I could not believe in you I could believe in nothing. Oh! I hope I shall never have cause to doubt you, Edmund!" and she lifted her eyes full of undefined fear to his.

"Don't look like that, Dora; it makes me feel such a brute."

The shadow of pain vanished, and once more she smiled at him.

"What has made us drift into this sad talk, Edmund? Probable happiness would be pleasanter to contemplate than possible faults and misery. You will drive in the pony carriage with me to the Burnham Beeches to-day, will you not, dear? It only holds two, and it will be nice to be together."

"With all my heart. We will try and have a happy day."

"Have you noticed how lovely the vernal tints are here, Edmund? The trees seem a tenderer green by the river than inland, and how perfect these willows are, especially the weeping ones! Is not Riversdale a pretty place, with its jewelled lawns down to the water's edge? Yet, beautiful as it is now, when the floods are out it is a complete scene of wreck and desolation; the flowers are washed away, the shrubs are uprooted, and the overgrown river reaches right up through the meadows. It must be like a happy life into which some desolating care sweeps and drives all beauty from it."

"And at the worst you see the floods abate, and the refreshed land looks all the more green and beautiful the following spring."

"Yes, I suppose trouble does purify," she said, softly; "but I fancy the same flowers never bloom again, but are replaced by others to bring brightness. There are people who can be equally content with the new flowers if they are beautiful; but, Edmund, if the floods came and drowned the blossoms of my life's happiness I could never replace them or care for others."

Her words seemed to silence him, for he did not attempt to answer her, but he pressed the little hand which rested on his arm more closely; and the breakfast gong sounding, he led her towards the house.

"We were drifting into a melancholy sort of talk, sweetheart. We must try to live on high ground, where the floods cannot reach us."

Then he stooped and kissed her, and passed into the hall to hang up his hat, and Dorothy entered the room without him.

"And now for Elise," he said to himself, as he prepared to follow his fiancée. "Poor girl! I hope she is wiser this morning," and there was almost a nervous feeling about his heart, at the thought of meeting her again, a mistrust of her, and, if the truth must be told, of himself too.

It was a relief to him to find only Dorothy and her parents at the breakfast-table, for Elise was now asleep after her fitful, restless night.

CHAPTER III.

A PIC-NIC AT BURNHAM BEECHES.

THERE were carriages of all sorts, sizes, and shapes drawn up in the garden drive at Riversdale, and laughing faces by the score were in the drawing-room, and on the green lawn.

Hamper after hamper was carried out and placed in the big "brake," for the cold collation which the party were to partake of under the spreading branches of the beautiful old Burnham Beeches.

Among the carriages was Dorothy Dunraven's little village cart, in which she and Sir Edmund were to be "Darby and Joan" on the journey to the place of meeting.

Many of the guests had already driven off, when Elise came out of the house, apparently in search of some one; and when her eye fell on Sir Edmund and her sister she joined them.

"Dorothy," she said, "mamma wants to know if you will go in the carriage with her?"

"No dear, I am going in the pony cart with Sir Edmund."

"Well! you had better tell her so yourself; I am not going in again. I shall mount the 'drag.' Captain Radcliffe wants me to sit on the box seat with him, and I shall like it awfully. Perhaps he will teach me to handle the ribbons."

"Don't let the horses run away, Sisse."

"Wouldn't it be fun if they did?" laughed the girl.

"It might not end in a joke, though. There is mamma at the door. I will speak to her," and Dorothy left the two alone.

"Why did you not manage to go with me?" asked Elise sharply.

"My dear girl, the thing was impossible. Dora naturally expects me to accompany her."

Elise bit her nether lip and tapped her pretty foot impatiently on the ground.

"She shall not return with you," she muttered, under her breath.

"Did you speak?" he inquired, not catching her words.

"Yes, I did."

Her cheeks were flushed, her bright eyes flashing.

Never had she looked so handsome. Her costume was of fine dark blue cloth trimmed with heavy cords of the same colour; the breast was of crimson ribbed silk, the cords crossing and recrossing over it like a hussar's jacket, while from the shoulder hung loops of crimson ribbon to match, and the little jockey cap of dark blue was relieved by a small crimson wing, the under skirt being of stripes of the two colours in rich corded silk.

Among the many elegant and becoming dresses which were grouped upon Mr. Dunraven's lawn, there was not a handsomer one than that worn by his young daughter Elise—a fact which he was not slow to notice.

"That girl knows how to dress!" he said, approvingly, to his wife.

"Worth knows how to dress her, certainly; the only fault I have to find with the costume is, that it makes her look too old."

"It's the girl, not the dress, my dear! Elise has grown quite a woman."

"A woman! Nonsense! She is barely fifteen!"

"Well! well! She is older than Dorothy now!"

"So she is in some ways!"

"I shall drive with Sir Edmund, mother dear; so I can't go with you to-day."

"So I supposed, my dear; but Elise would have it that you were coming in the carriage!"

"Elise! how very odd."

"Are you coming with me, Miss Elise?" asked Captain Radcliffe. "I'll book the box seat for you both ways if you will honour me!"

"All right, do! I love being on a drag. And Captain Radcliffe, will you teach me to drive?"

"By all means. Are you ready to start?"

"We shall look down on you, Sir Edmund," she laughed. "Don't get in front, for I might not be able to manage the horses, and I might overturn you and Dorothy."

"I don't fancy you would mind doing it a bit, by the expression of your face!" he returned, laughing too. "Shall I help you to your exalted position?"

"No, thanks; Captain Radcliffe can take care of me," and she gave him a look of mixed reproach and defiance.

"Take care of yourself, Elise," he said softly.

"Why should I?" she replied, recklessly. "There is no one to care if I break my neck."

"Elise!"

The tone of his voice was tender, and sent the blood to her cheek.

She turned from him and gave her hand to Captain Radcliffe, and sprang lightly up on to the box seat, and talked gaily to him while he gathered up the reins; and the rest of the party clambered to their places, and the drag moved off, the grooms running by the horses' sides till they were out of the grounds and jumping up with the coach in motion with the agility of monkeys.

Sir Edmund gnawed his moustache with a pre-occupied air as he watched them start, but Elise never once turned her head towards him.

"It is better so," he said to himself. "She will find it easy to forget and to console herself; but how lovely she looked! I suppose the man is in love with her. Well, I don't wonder if he is; the girl has an especial charm of her own—hard to resist. If I had met her before Dorothy—"

"Oh! here you are, Dora! Are you ready to start?" and he turned to help her into the small vehicle.

Doubtless Dora's lover was thoroughly enjoying himself, but he was very silent, and his eyes wandered restlessly along the road in front of them, where the drag had halted for some purpose; and when they started again, just ahead of the pony carriage, Elise was in possession of the "ribbons."

The spirit of mischief seemed to have taken a strong hold of her, and Captain Radcliffe trembled for the safety of his carriage, his horses, and his own bones; but Elise was so charming and seemed so pleased with herself, that he could not find it in his heart to depose her from her position of driver; and the horses, feeling a new and inexperienced hand over them, took liberties that they would not have presumed to take with their master.

"Good heavens! Radcliffe must be mad to let that girl drive in such a reckless way," cried Sir Edmund excitedly. "I wish we could overtake them and stop her from driving."

"Elise is very wilful; she would not give up the reins because you told her."

"I think she would!"

Dorothy looked at him in surprise.

"Are you really alarmed about Elise? I fear we can't expect poor little 'Puck' to overtake those four powerful steeds."

This she added, as Sir Edmund brought the whip sharply down the pony's side, when he was already trotting at his utmost pace.

"No, you are right," he said, mastering his impatience with an effort; "it is useless to try," and he drew Puck lightly in.

After a few minutes he remarked apologetically,—

"I never could bear to see a woman in danger."

"I hope Elise is not really in danger," returned Dorothy, gently. "Captain Radcliffe is a splendid whip, and he would not, I think, let her get into trouble."

"Not if he could help it, of course, but Elise seems very headstrong; he might find it as difficult to govern her as she the horses."

They were out of sight now, and Sir Edmund was thinking of little else but Elise all the way.

He was very affectionate and attentive to Dorothy, but there was something wanting, and the drive did not prove as enjoyable as one as she had anticipated; yet she could not have told you what had been lacking.

Very eagerly did the Baronet glance round the corner as he turned in among the Burnham Beeches, and a sigh of relief escaped him when he saw Elise, with the captain by her side, seated on the grass chatting gaily. But the satisfaction died out when he found that Elise

took not the faintest notice of him, but seemed to be on the most friendly terms of easy intimacy with her soldier companion, and her silvery laughter was ringing out among the old beeches, rippling from bough to bough, followed by his deeper tones.

"Elise seems very happy," remarked Sir Edmund, somewhat sharply.

"Yes! She looks a woman, but she is a very child for enjoyment. She won't laugh like that five years hence."

"It is to be hoped not."

"Oh! I like to hear her cheerful. Trouble will come soon enough, and when once it touches her that childish laugh will be a thing of the past!"

"Did you ever laugh like that, Dora?" he inquired, with a smile.

"I! Oh, no! Elise has a much more sunny nature than mine. I think I have always been a quiet, uninteresting little creature, very much what I am now."

"Are you fishing, Dora?"

"Fishing! For what?"

"Compliments, to be sure."

"Not I! I would sooner have a rude thing said to me than be paid a meaningless compliment. It is humiliating to think that a man should suppose we women are so weak as to like them to talk such utter nonsense to us."

"I am not sure, Dora, that compliments are meaningless from most men. A few may make flattering speeches with no object, but more often it is their first step to win affection, love, admiration—something, at any rate, for themselves."

"I had not thought of it in that light."

"I dare say not. You do not know much of the world, darling! Many children are more up to its ways than you, I think."

"Do you mind, Edmund?" she asked, with a wistful look, turning her soft eyes to his, questioningly.

"No, little one. I like you to be innocent."

She nestled a little closer to his side.

"I can hardly boast of innocence, dear! Only ignorance, I fear."

"Well, it amounts to much the same thing. See, here come the carriages. Shall I go and help your mother out?"

"Thank you, I will go with you!"

"So, here you are, Mrs. Dunraven, safe and sound. I hope we are to have some of the fun of spreading the luncheon, but I suppose your servants will be indignant if they are interfered with, though to my mind it is half the pleasure of a picnic."

"To be sure it is. The servants can do the things you won't like doing—unpack, wait on us, wash up, and pack again!"

"That is true. One feels lazy after a good feed, and washing up is a decided effort. Dorothy, will you come for a walk now, under the Beeches? And what time do you intend to lunch, Mrs. Dunraven?"

"Oh, about two o'clock, I think!"

"Very well! Then we will be back by one, and make ourselves useful."

And, lovers though they were, they were back, true to their word.

"Military punctuality! oh, Mrs. Dunraven!" said Sir Edmund, showing her his watch.

"Much more so than the military man's," she laughed. "Captain Radcliffe vowed he would be here to assist at a quarter before one, but he has not made his appearance yet!"

At her words, the Baronet's eyes ran rapidly over such members of the party as were assembled there in groups of two's, three's, and four's, and a look of annoyance settled upon his face.

"We have brought some wreaths of eglantine to twine among things, mother," said Dorothy, holding up an armful of long sprays. "Don't you think they will make a lovely garnish to the pie-dishes?"

"I'll tell you when I see them, my dear; and now, if you really wish to help, get on

with your work, because, at present, you are only hindering the servants."

"Here is a nice smooth spot!" said Sir Edmund; "let us lay the cloth here. Yes! that is right! Wouldn't it be as well to cut this ham in slices, and not remove any till they are wanted; it would save time and trouble. I see the chickens are already divided, and all tied together with ribbon. The ox who had such a tongue as that, Dora, must have been a fine fellow! It is the biggest I ever saw! Now, here is a chance for you, little one! Here is a dish for you to garnish."

"What is it?"

"Oh, a pigeon pie. Now for your wrath. Shall I hold it for you? If you don't keep it straight you will spill the gravy and spoil your dress. By-the-by, white suits you, Dora!"

"I think it does most people."

"I am not so sure of that. Stout people, for instance, should never wear it. Let me fasten that for you. It really does look very nice, and, on the white cloth, it will show up better still. I'm glad you thought of it."

"Here come Elise and Captain Radcliffe!"

"So I see!" returned the Baronet, sharply. And when the other two joined them, he took no notice whatever of the girl, but paid Dorothy the most marked care and attention. More than once Elise paused to look at him in wonder.

"He cannot care for her like that, or he never would have acted as he did last night," she told herself again and again, and her own mood grew fitful. "At one moment she was silent and still, the next her laughter rang out feverishly, and she flirted in the most audacious manner. She mocked at poor Dorothy's egotism, and made game of everything she had done."

"Who will make the claret-cup?" inquired Mrs. Dunraven, coming to them with a loving-
cup in her hand.

"Oh! Sir Edmund will," said Dorothy. "His is the best I ever tasted."

"I shall be happy, if it won't offend the butler," he laughed.

"I hope we consider our servants' comforts," said Mrs. Dunraven, "but we don't take any notice of their fancies. If they remain in our service they must like our ways. I don't see any reason for sacrificing one's self to one's servants!"

"You are quite right. They don't respect you any the more for it. Quite the reverse!" "Is not this a pretty port wine jelly, with all this gold-leaf floating in it?" remarked Elise, holding up a shape to Sir Edmund Drake.

But, with a reply that he was no judge of cookery, he turned from her to admire the colouring of a cream, which was smothered in hundreds and hundreds of tiny balls of silver.

"Gold-leaf!" exclaimed Mr. Dunraven to his wife, "why, that is enough to poison anyone! Metal—pure metal! Desire the cook never to use it again!"

"The quantity used is so small it can't be very unwholesome, my dear," laughed Mrs. Dunraven; "and it settles towards the top of the shape; so if people don't like it, they can leave that part, you know."

"I am afraid there are not many things we should eat if we questioned whether each article of food had anything not quite wholesome in it," remarked Captain Radcliffe. "The best way is to shut your eyes, if you like the taste, and ask no questions."

"Where is the brandy for the claret-cup, Dora?" called Sir Edmund.

"Oh! do you put brandy in it?" inquired Mrs. Dunraven.

"To be sure I do. It mellows it, and ensures its not disagreeing with you. I will warrant no one is ever the worse for my claret-cup. Will you slice some cucumber, Dorothy? I know you like to be useful. Yes, lemon, and sugar, and claret, and soda-water; that is right. I think we are all ready for the guests."

"And I am sure they are the same for you," returned Mr. Dunraven; "they are all as hungry as hunters. I hope we have plenty to eat!"

"He is always afraid on that score," said Mrs. Dunraven, with a smile.

"If we get through all this we shall do well," said Captain Radcliffe.

"Shall I carve that quarter of lamb, or shall I sound the assembly? I'll give them the right tune with the bugle call," and he made an excellent imitation of that brazen instrument, which brought the laughing throng crowding around the "spread."

"Take your seats, ladies and gentlemen, and make yourselves at home," shouted Mr. Dunraven, good-humouredly. "This is Liberty Hall, you know—the blue arch of Heaven for our roof, and nature's carpet for our flooring!"

In a few minutes everyone was busy with knife, fork, and spoon. Champagne corks flew, the loving-cup passed round, and spirits, which were equable before, now rose, till the quietest eyes had a sparkle in them, while the mischievous ones were fairly dancing.

"I am loyal," cried Mr. Dunraven. "Let us drink to the health of the Queen."

"I have another toast to propose," said Captain Radcliffe, leaning forward, glass in hand. "A little bird has whispered that we may offer our congratulations to a happy young couple present, and wish them a joyous future."

Sir Edmund looked annoyed, while Dorothy's colour deepened guiltily.

"You're in for it, Drake," laughed Mr. Dunraven, good-humouredly. "Some one has split upon you, and you will have to return thanks."

But the Baronet took not the remotest notice of the toast; he merely nodded familiarly to his future father-in-law, and remarked, quietly,—

"The Queen is admissible, but no private questions, I think."

Then he smiled at Dorothy, and a somewhat awkward silence ensued.

"What an insufferable fellow Sir Edmund is!" whispered Captain Radcliffe to Elise. "I fear you will find him an uncomfortable brother-in-law!"

"Who said he was to be my brother-in-law?" retorted the girl. "You did not hear it from me!"

"That is true; and perhaps the report is incorrect. If that is the case I am very sorry I should have made such a mistake."

He looked at her questioningly, but she was apparently engaged studying the pattern of her plate, and tracing it with one of the prongs of her fork.

"I wish you would tell me, Miss Elise, whether I have been misinformed? If so I will apologise."

"By way of another toast!" she retorted, sarcastically.

"I did not say so. How have I offended you, Miss Dunraven? We were very good friends just now."

"I am not Miss Dunraven."

"Miss Elise, then! Come, now, is Sir Edmund engaged to your sister?"

"I am not in his confidence, Captain Radcliffe. If you want to know, you had better ask him yourself."

He laughed.

"I fear the handsome Baronet is no favourite of yours, Miss Elise, so we will drop him. Let us make a party, and go for a walk. I'll take you to see the new Peak drive, which, by-the-by, is not to my mind an improvement to the place. However, it is useful."

Elise sprang to her feet, and invited several young people to join them for a stroll, and away went the merry crew under the shade of the lovely beaches.

"It is a charming place for a picnic, Miss Elise," said the Captain; "and for a walk, too!"

"Yes, if people get rightly paired. It would be rather a nuisance, for instance, to

find oneself in for a *tête-à-tête* with a fat old alderman, and to know that the man you wished to walk with had been given to his wife."

"Perhaps you would prefer that even to his being given to some pretty girl."

"Perhaps I should, if I were selfish."

"We are all selfish where our affections are concerned. There never was love without jealousy yet."

"But jealousy is a horrible thing, and leads people to commit all sorts of shocking acts."

"It does. But the seeds of it are in every heart where love exists."

"That is when people can't trust each other."

"Not a bit of it. You may have confidence in the truth of the person you love, and yet may dislike to see them care, in ever such an innocent fashion, for some one else. There are so many sorts of affections, you see."

"I had no idea you went in for being an oracle," said Elise, cynically.

"Nor had I; your remarks called mine out. Let me see, how did it all begin? You didn't wish to be paired off with an alderman."

"I hope it is not quite so bad as all that, Miss Elise. Personally, I am quite satisfied."

"That is fortunate; for we can easily change partners, you see."

"Who would you have had instead of me? Sir Edmund?"

"I shouldn't mind."

He looked at her critically.

"You either like, or dislike that man very much."

"Then say that I dislike him, what then?" she returned defiantly.

"Then I should be very glad, and I should ask you not to like anyone at present."

"Why not at present?"

"My dear girl. You are at school now, are you not?"

"What if I am? Need that prevent my having feelings?"

"Don't be cross, Elise. In a couple of years' time you will understand me better, perhaps."

"I don't wish to understand you either now or then," she answered crossly; and calling a girl-friend to her side, she passed her hand through her arm, and kept her there.

The sun was setting.

A gipsy camp had been prepared for tea, and now that delight was over, and all the guests had assembled at the appointed meeting-place, except Elise Dunraven, Captain Radcliffe, and the party who had gone out with them.

Carriages were waiting, and horses impatiently pawing the ground.

"What has become of Elise?" called Mr. Dunraven to Dorothy.

"Eight of them went off for a walk, papa, and they have not yet returned."

"Well, there are enough of them to take care of each other. We need not wait, mamma. Radcliffe can bring them all home in his drag. Dorothy, you will return as you came, I suppose?"

"Yes, papa!" she replied, with a happy smile.

And so the carriages were filled, and one by one drove off, till only two remained—the drag and the village cart.

"Shall we go, or wait for them, Edmund?" asked Dorothy of her silent lover.

"You cannot with propriety leave your young sister," he returned irritably. "I can't think why Radcliffe cannot be punctual as well as the rest of the party!"

"It is not all Captain Radcliffe's fault. There are seven other delinquents; but Edmund, I don't think you like the gallant Captain; you certainly are down upon him."

"I don't know about being down on him; the man is a puppy, and an impertinent one to boot. The idea of his mentioning our engagement publicly like that."

"I don't believe he meant to be rude. Elise must have told him."

"I think not."

"Why?"

"I cannot assign a reason for everything, Dorothy."

"Why not Dora? That is your name for me, Edmund."

"One is not obliged always to use the same appellation, child! Of what importance is it whether I call you one, or the other, or neither?"

She looked at him in some surprise, and shrank back into her quiet mood.

"You and Elise will both take cold, that will be the end of this folly. Have you no wrap?"

"It was such a warm day. I did not think I should need one. As to Elise, her dress is very thick. I was surprised to see her put it on. It would have been more suitable for the early autumn."

"It becomes her, and that is what you ladies think most about, I suppose."

"Some do, I daresay."

"Why here is Radcliffe coming alone! What can be the meaning of this?"

He quickly joined them.

"Miss Dunraven," he said, "your sister has sprained her uncle and can't move. We have been waiting, hoping to get her on, but she seems no better. It is awfully unfortunate. I am more than sorry. I thought I had better come and fetch you, as she asked to have Sir Edmund sent to her."

"Oh! poor Elise! Of course we will go to her at once, poor girl! Is she suffering much pain?"

"I am afraid so. That is, when she moves."

A dark cloud settled on the Baronet's face.

"If you had charge of her, Captain Radcliffe, surely you might have taken care of her," he said sternly.

"Indeed it was through no fault of mine. She caught her foot in the root of a tree and fell. No one can regret the fact more than I do."

"I am sure of that; you like Elise, don't you? You and she have been quarrelling and making it up again as long as I can remember."

"That is about it, Miss Dorothy. There is no one more fond of Elise than I am—sincerely fond of her, and I believe she will make a splendid woman in a few years, but you must not let her think herself one yet, or she will be spoilt."

"I believe you are right, but you spoil her more than any one else, I think."

"I'm privileged, you see."

Sir Edmund Drake struck the heel of his boot savagely in the ground, and felt very angry with Dorothy for her familiar chatting with Captain Radcliffe.

When they reached her, Elise Dunraven was leaning against the trunk of a tree, looking rather pale, and the others were gathered sympathetically around her.

"I am sorry you are hurt, darling," said Dorothy, kneeling beside her, and taking her hand.

"I want to get home," said the girl, with a tremble in her lip.

"Of course you do, dear! Someone can lift you up, if we could bring the drag here."

"I can't go in the drag—I hate it," she returned, irritably. "I'll go in the pony cart; it won't shake me half so much."

"It will shake you ten times more, but if you would prefer it, I am sure Edmund will be happy to take charge of you!"

"I should prefer it! One does not want to talk when one is in pain, and you can go on the box seat!"

"Oh, yes, I can do that! Edmund, you can bring the cart round here for Elise, can't you?"

"Are you sure you don't mind, Dora?" he whispered, falling into the familiar name. "It is kind of you to give Elise your place."

"Yes, I do mind losing your company, dear," she returned, in a low voice; "but I am glad we can help my sister."

He clasped her hand and went to fetch the little pony carriage, and although she was

disappointed, she felt very happy at his words of commendation.

"Let them all go," Elise whispered to Sir Edmund, as he attempted to help her to rise.

"Suppose you walk on and start before us; we shall have to come quietly, and Puck will want to run a race with you if you follow us."

The girl gave him a grateful glance, and Dorothy, seeing their wishes, went on with the others in Elise's place, leaving the two alone.

Neither spoke till they were out of sight, then he laid his hand on hers.

"Elise, I am so sorry you are in pain!"

"I don't mind that sort of pain," she answered, with tears upon her long dark lashes.

"What sort do you mind, Elise?"

"The sort you make me suffer," she returned, great drops rolling down her cheeks. "I wish—I wish I were dead!"

"Hush, child! Don't speak like that! Dorothy would never make such a speech!"

"Dorothy!" she said, scornfully. "Dorothy does not know how to enjoy, or how to suffer. She is an iceberg. She cares for nothing. Don't put my feelings beside hers, for Heaven's sake!"

"Do you feel so much, dear girl?"

"Feel!" and she burst into passionate sobbing.

"Don't, Elise, pray, pray don't! I never could stand a woman's tears, as I think I told you before, and if I didn't I meant to!" and he drew her head upon his shoulder, and placed his arm around her waist. "Don't cry, dear girl. Come, tell me, have you had a happy day?"

"Happy! I have been miserable. I shall hate the Burnham Beeches as long as I live!"

"What made you miserable, Elise?"

"You did! You went off with Dorothy, and you wouldn't give me a kind look all day."

"Elise, does Radcliffe care for you?"

"I don't know. I believe he does; but he thinks me too young to love anyone."

"How do you know?"

"He told me so."

"When?"

"To-day."

"Do you love him, Elise?"

"No, I don't think so; but love begets love, you know."

He looked at her. What a beautiful young girl she was, with her rich damask rose hues, and her large speaking eyes!

A great madness took possession of him, and he caught her to his breast.

"Elise, you shall never love him! You have given your love to me, and I claim it! Neither Radcliffe nor any other man shall be anything to you—I swear it!"

"But—Dorothy," and she hung back from him.

Her very lack of reciprocation to his passion at that moment increased it.

"I cannot help Dorothy. My engagement to her is a mistake. If my affection for her were of the right sort I could not feel for you as I do, darling!"

"Are you sure?"

"Certain."

"And you will tell her this?"

"Yes!"

She raised her eyes to his, all aglow with a wild joy. Her face, beautiful as it was before, seemed doubly so as he looked at it.

"Are you now all my own?" she asked.

"I am, and you are mine, Elise!"

Then he held out his arms to her, and, with a glad cry, she sheltered in them.

And the sun sank in the heavens, while the two, forgetful of all but their own passionate happiness, sat there absorbed in their new-found joy.

(To be concluded in our next.)

It is the up-stretched hand that meets the down-stretched hand.

A SECRET SIN.

—o—

CHAPTER XXXV.—(Continued.)

He was still a little sore at having found out that Vyvyan and Pera were hopelessly attached to each other, and was trying to make himself like someone else better.

In this he was sure to succeed, as he was not the sort of man to be passionately in love when no encouragement was given; all the same, he was not disposed to be flattered by the facile devotion of many of the Warburton belles.

He was obliged to leave Paris before the others, as he had promised Vyvyan to be his best man, and they were not going to return till after the tenth.

The wedding was to take place in the private chapel in the park, and the bishop of the diocese—a relation of Lady Haughton's—was to perform the ceremony.

Bertie, looking harassed and worried, met Val at the station, and they drove back to barracks together.

"Well, old fellow, and how have you been getting on?" he asked, with a cordial grip of Captain Valentine's hand.

"First class—and you? How do you feel—like a convict going to be executed?"

"Like the luckiest man on earth!" turning away his face.

"Seriously!—how is Miss Haughton?"

"Getting along splendidly. She dines downstairs now, and talks of dancing at the balls in the Elysée when we get over the water. By-the-by, I'm commissioned to bring you to Haughton at once. We both dine there."

"Whew! First night! I've such a heap to tell them all. I was looking forward to mess."

"Put it off till to-morrow."

"I shall have drunk too much cham. in the middle of the day."

Of course he went, because he wouldn't desert Vyvyan, and they had a very cheerful evening, in spite of all the skeletons in the cupboard.

For the first time for many a long day there was a lovely hectic flush on Eva's cheeks as she sat by her lover's side—her eyes sparkling with joy.

Her soft laugh rang out joyously in answer to some amusing remark of Val's, and her mother looked at her with fond delight.

Evidently her prescription had answered splendidly, and Bertie Vyvyan, with his handsome face and pleasant ways, had done more good than all the medicine in the world. Still, prudence was necessary, and she advised Eva to go to bed early, in order to prepare for the fatigues of the morrow.

But the young bride was so perfectly happy that she could not bear to shorten the evening unnecessarily, and when Lady Haughton became too persistent in her advice, she drew Bertie away into the conservatory.

"I want to give you something for your buttonhole to-morrow, which hasn't come out of a shop."

"Your flowers will come from Covent Garden. I'm afraid you will have to put up with it," he said, with a smile.

"So long as you give them, do you suppose I shall care?" she answered, with a loving look over her shoulders, as she stooped to pick some lilies of the valley.

She twisted a piece of her hair round the stems, and held them out to him. Then, changing her mind, she put them into his coat with her own fingers, placing a piece of fern behind the frail white blossoms.

"Now, promise me one thing!" she said, earnestly. "I want you to keep them as long as you live!"

"They shall be kept as long as my life lasts; and, perhaps, if you survive me, your own little hands shall put them in my coffin," looking down into her face with a smile.

Though she was delicate through illness just at present, she might last the longest of the two—for there would be no risks in her

life as there would in his, if he gained the wish of his heart, and went on active service.

"No, no!" she said, hastily; "we must go together, or I must go first. I won't be left behind!"

Then she rested her head against his coat, and he bent down till his cheek rested on her forehead, and there was silence between them, each thinking his or her thoughts, which were too deep for words.

The clock of the chapel struck eleven in silvery tones. Bertie started,—

"I must go."

"Not yet!"

"Indeed, I must! I've half-a-hundred things to see after! Good-bye, dear, till to-morrow!" then taking her face between his hands, he kissed her lips.

"Oh, Bertie! my own—own Bertie!" and she wound her white arms round his neck. "After to-morrow there will be no good-byes!"

"This is not much of one," with a smile; "only till to-morrow!"

So they parted.

He took her to the foot of the stairs by her own wish, and she looked back at him fondly when she came to the first turning—a pretty graceful figure, seeming in her white dress like the lily of the valley in his bottomhole.

He waved his hand to her and turned away, satisfied that he had played his part bravely.

That night he tore up and set fire to a few formal notes he had received from Pera, and threw the withered yellow rose into the blazing heap.

It seemed to him that his own heart was being tortured by the flame as he watched it shrivel and blacken. So ended the sweetest chapter of his life. To-morrow he must begin another!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was Lady Haughton's invariable habit to pay a visit to her daughter's room before retiring finally for the night. However late, or however unwell, she never omitted it, feeling that she could not rest comfortably unless she knew how her child was.

On this, the last night before the wedding, she had so much to say to Bertie that he was not able to leave the house till after twelve. She bade him good-night at last, with a pleasant feeling in her anxious heart.

If she must give up her daughter to anyone, it was an immense comfort to know that her future husband was a thorough gentleman, with one of the kindest hearts in the world.

As the two brother-officers drove homewards, both of them rather oppressed by the gravity of the situation, Lady Haughton, in her crimson dressing-gown trimmed with plush, came softly along the corridor and opened Eva's door. To her surprise the room was brightly lighted, candles still burning on the toilette-table, a silver lamp on the mantelpiece, when she knew that Eva could not endure a ray of light after she was in bed. But one glance at the bed showed her that she had not yet begun to rest. It was vexatious, and Lady Haughton heaved a displeased sigh, as she pushed open the door of the dressing-room.

She must send her to bed at once, or she would never be fit for anything the next day. As the door slowly yielded to her hand, a sight met her eyes which, for years of sorrow and regret, was photographed on her brain.

Eva, clothed in a snow-white wrapper, was kneeling at her prayers, her graceful figure drooping like a snow-drop, her small dark head resting against the crimson cushion of the sofa.

The lace curtains of the window seemed to make a sort of shrine in the background, round a beautiful alabaster statuette of an angel.

The angel's wings were outstretched as if ready to bear a soul from earth, and in his hand was a lily, which the young bride of the morrow had worn that night!

"It is like a lovely picture," thought Lady Haughton, "but I must not let the child be up any longer. Eva, dear," she said softly "it is getting late."

There was no movement in answer to her gentle appeal; and unwilling to break in upon her devotions with another remark, Lady Haughton contented herself with fidgeting about the room, putting out some of the lights, and picking up a handkerchief which was lying on the floor, &c. &c. Then she gave a loud yawn, and sat down on the sofa, letting her thoughts stray backwards over the past nine months, and after a while, almost forgetting how the time was passing, as she thought of the fearful anxiety she had been through, and rejoiced over the happy ending in a wedding which seemed sure to secure her happiness.

One of the candles which had burnt low in its socket suddenly lost all stamina in its wick, and went out. Lady Haughton was roused from her reverie by the darkening of the room, and got up, shocked at the lateness of the hour. "Eva must be asleep," she thought, and going up to her she laid her hand lovingly on her shoulder.

"Child, you must come to bed, or you will be fit for nothing to-morrow."

No answer.

"Eva!" a little louder. No movement—only utter stillness; even the lace which covered her chest was not stirred by a breath. So still—so cold—so mute! What did it mean? Had she fainted?

The mother clasped her hands against her breast, and gasped. Oh, Heaven! it could not be. She was so much better. Only a little while ago she was laughing—and now! She was tired out, but that would soon pass, and she would be quite well to-morrow.

She must get up from her knees at once—the attitude was exhausting, even for people who were strong. Then with hands that shook as if with palsy, Lady Haughton tried to raise her up, but a sudden heaviness and stiffness seemed to have come into the slight figure which was generally supple as a young willow. Then she stooped, her panic growing greater, her breath coming fast, her heart almost standing still, and looked into her daughter's face. The next moment a cry of bitter agony rang through the house—"Oh Heaven, my child!" and the mother, in heartbroken anguish, sank on the floor.

Yes, Eva Haughton was dead! Called away on the eve of her bridal, when life seemed to be so radiant with happiness as to form a perfect reflex of Heaven—she had gone, with her wedding-dress lying on the chair beside her, in its beauty of lace and pearl-embroidered satin, destined never to be worn—with her lover waiting but a few miles off, ready to give her his name, and devote his life to her, on the morrow; with every hope on the point of fruition—every wish on the eve of attainment. She had gone; and neither the love of father, mother, nor bridegroom could call her back!

"Oh! the pity of it!" cried those who had loved her, forgetting that she had died in the zenith of her happiness, before she had time to see it wane—before she had known the chill of disappointment—before she had watched the vanishing of her illusions—and gone to a better land, where there is no grief, no pain, no possibility of failure!

To Bertie Vyvyan, the news of his release came as a fearful shock. He hurried to Haughton, and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he looked upon the quiet calm beauty of the face which had rested on his shoulder so lovingly the night before, and knew that never again would it smile into his—never again would those eyes, now closed so hermetically, look into his with unquenchable love in their glorious depths.

Poor child! She had loved him he thought, far better than he deserved; and, as he knelt down and murmured a prayer, his heart was full of remorse for slight acts of carelessness

during their engagement—small acts which would have sat lightly on his conscience if there had been any possibility of future amends.

The lilies of the valley, which she had given him, were put in an envelope, and hidden away in a safe place. He resolved that he would never part with them, even if another wife ever stood by his side—even if the love of another completely filled his heart.

He had given his pledge to Eva, and when he was dead—unless he died on the field of battle, when it might not be possible—they should rest in his coffin—a last memorial of the passionate love which only ended with her life.

Once again the spring came round with primroses, starring the grass with pale yellow sunshine. The White Lancers had long ago moved their quarters, and their tall forms were no longer to be seen lounging in the High-street.

Captain Godfrey Valentine had gone to York, after breaking the hearts of many Warburton beauties, and Bertie Vyvyan had accompanied him, with the rest of his comrades, much to the regret of Lady Haughton, who had grown to love him like a son.

Paul Le Mesurier, having experienced the cold shoulder quite long enough, and having utterly failed in his schemes against his rival, exchanged into another regiment—not very long before the White Lancers received orders to embark for Egypt. Active service! The very thought gave new life to Bertie, and rejoiced the heart of Val.

He was growing *blasé*, he said, and wanted distractions, being tired of horses, girls, and flirtations. There was one thing he must do before leaving England, and that was—run down to Warburton, and say good-bye to Lady Hargreave.

He proposed to Vyvyan to come with him; but he intimidated, in common parlance, that he had other fish to fry, so they started together one lovely day, when the green buds were bursting, and the birds were singing joyously—and parted at Warburton station.

Lady Hargreave was delighted to see "her boy," and made as much of him as an elderly lady can; and Pera, who was staying at the Hall for one short week, behaved very prettily to him, and laughed softly at his smallest joke.

She had a new gown on of pale grey cashmere, which was infinitely becoming, and Val thought Bertie was an ass not to have come and made use of this last opportunity.

Lady Hargreave inquired after him, and was told he had gone to Haughton; but Pera said nothing, as she bent over her work with a richer colour in her cheeks.

"If he had cared for me one tiniest bit," she thought, bitterly, "he would never have gone away without bidding me good-bye!"

Somehow she felt "out of it" that evening and was glad to steal into the garden by herself, and leave Val alone with his dear old friend.

There was perfect friendship between those two, and there were so many things they had to say to one another on this their last night together.

He sat on a stool by Lady Hargreave's side, and every now and then, when nobody was supposed to be looking, she put out her small white hand, with the diamonds sparkling on her fingers, and laid it tenderly on his short-cropped, sunny curls. Ah! how the memory of his father clung to her still, and made her heart go out in tenderness to his son!

"She is richer than I," thought Pera, as she sat on the low wall. "I have no friend devoted to me, and papa finds perfect consolation for my absence in his books. I'm just one of those solitary girls who might go into a sisterhood and never be missed."

The stars came out one by one, and all the sounds in the valley grew silent. There was the noise of wheels on the ground—probably the fly which was to take Captain Valentine to the station; but that was not to come till half-past ten, and she had no idea that it was so late. Perhaps she had better go in.

She got up from her seat, and looked down into the valley, through which the river was winding like a silver thread, with here and there a dark shadow thrown across it like in her own life.

"Miss Clifford, Pera! I've been to the Gatehouse, but you weren't there," said the voice she loved better than any other, the voice of Bertie, and all in a moment the shadows seemed to vanish, as she turned round breathlessly.

Her hands were in his, her heart beating fast, but still she had not said a word. He was there, that was quite enough—there was no need to ask a question.

"You've heard that we are off?"

She bent her head.

"But I could not go till I had seen you!" his voice husky with deep emotion. "Darling! there's one thing I want to ask you—when I come back will you be my wife?"

"I don't know," her chest heaving, her lips trembling. "You mayn't care—how can I tell?"

"Pera, when you know that I have never loved anyone else, not even Eva!" his tone low and hushed. "Tell me quick, for Heaven's sake. I've lived in this hope for years."

Her eyes slowly raised themselves to his, and the next moment his arms were round her trembling figure and his eager kisses on her lips.

"Ah! when I come back," he said in a whisper, "there will be nobody so happy as you and I. Darling, to think I've got you at last!" and tears of rapturous joy were shining in his eyes.

Parted so long by Bernard Vansittart's Secret Sin, there was nothing to divide them now, but the risks and dangers of a soldier's life.

The campaign came to an end as all things do in this world. Bertie came home and sold out. A quiet wedding followed, and though years have come and gone he and Pera are supremely happy. Val has never married, and is still the beau of the regiment, as gay and brilliant as ever, and always a welcome guest at Bertie's home.

[THE END.]

LEARNING HOUSEKEEPING.—An English lady who has resided for some time on the Continent writes:—The complaints I hear daily about servants and housekeeping induce me to make a proposal—namely, that of establishing the system which is practised in Germany, of sending every young girl, after she has finished her school education and before she is "out," to learn housekeeping. This every girl in Germany does, be she the daughter of a nobleman, officer, or small official. She goes direct from school into a family corresponding to her station in life. Those who are rich go where they pay well, and are in a "good family," so that they are enabled to live well, and have good cooking and great variety. No one is taken into one of these establishments for less than a year, so that with every month a new branch is learned—one month the preserving of fruit in season, the next, laying in of apples and vegetables for winter use, preserving of eggs and butter, etc. These girls are taught everything, from washing dishes, sweeping and polishing the floors, clear-starching and ironing, dusting and cleaning ornaments, cooking, laying the table, waiting upon the table, polishing the silver and glass, to decorating the tables with flowers and fruits. Great is the ambition of the pupil to hear that her taste and management are the best. Combined with these duties are those of keeping the household linen in repair, and learning plain sewing. Thus the young girl gets experience in household affairs. Though the pupils have to learn everything, servants are kept in these establishments, who, in their turn, are taught by the advanced pupils, who have learned from the mother of the family. This accounts for the excellent housekeeping in Germany, where comfort is combined with economy.

FACETIÆ.

THE merchant vessels do a good business, because they have always large sails.

CATS are not so much to blame, after all. Every dog has his day, and the cats have to take up with the nights.

A LITTLE girl wanted to say that she had a fan, but had forgotten the name; so she described it as "a thing to brush the warm off you with."

A ROY, seeing a lady of his acquaintance looking at poultry in a market, said to her: "Ah, Mrs. Montague, are you going to have a goose at dinner to-day?" "Yes, if you'll come," answered the lady.

A TOURIST telling a lady about his having fallen into the river Exe, in Devonshire, concluded by saying: "I suppose you will think I was pretty wet?" "Yes," replied the lady, "you were certainly wet in the Exe-stream."

ENFANT TERRIBLE (who had been lying in wait for the visitor): "Mr. Borelong, are you going to stay till ten o'clock?" Mr. B.: "Why, would you like to have me?" E. T.: "No; but pa said he bet you would, and ma thought you wouldn't have the cheek."

AN Irishman applied to a lady who had taken a house at Bray for the summer for employment. "But, my good man," replied the lady, "I have brought my servants with me. I have nothing for you to do." "Ah, thin, ma'am, if ye only knew how little work it'd take to occupy me!"

DEAREST FRANK, if I were to suppose for a moment that you were going to marry me for my money, I should in despair put an end to my wretched existence." Frank: "Calm yourself, dearest. Let us get married as soon as possible, and you shall see what efforts I'll make to get rid of all my money."

PICKING OUT PLUMP OSES.—Lady (in butcher's shop): "You can put aside about half-a-dozen of your plumpest partridges." Butcher: "Yes, ma'am. Shall I send them right away?" Lady: "No; my husband is out shooting partridges to-day, and he will call for them this evening."

"I've a perfect antipathy for the mountains," said Mrs. Gush to Mrs. Parvenu, as they sat talking together on the hotel piazza. "Have you?" said Mrs. Parvenu. "Well, I've an Alpine stick, and the man said it was just the thing, but I'm sorry now I didn't buy an antipathy like yours."

"SCOUNDREL," said McSwilligen, "what is the shape of a ship after it has been beaten to pieces on a rock?" "I should think it would have no shape at all, or at least be in very bad shape," was the reply. "On the contrary, its shape is very regular." "What is it, then?" "A wreck-tangle."

MASTER: "Johanna, it affords me pleasure to express my entire satisfaction with the really delicious outlets you served up to-day." Cook: "I am not surprised you enjoyed them. Gnadiger Herr; they were at first intended for the coachman, but poor Friedrich did not feel well and had lost his appetite."

SAID Fogg, "I just met a poor fellow who told an awful tale of distress, and wound up by asking me for a shilling." Brown: "And of course you gave it to him?" Fogg: "No; I wanted to; but his tale was so painful that I burst into tears, and in my emotion I quite forgot the poor fellow and hastened away to hide my grief."

THE DIFFERENCE.—"I want Lillian to be highly accomplished," said a frivolous mother, "fit to shine in any society, and specially accomplished in singing. Lillian, sing 'Gathering up the Shells from the Shore,' dear." "I do not wish my daughter Mary Ann to have accomplishments," said a grim caller, who was a female doctor. "I want her to be thoroughly versed in modern science. She is only seven years old, but she is well along in physiology. Mary Ann, say your bones."

THE facetious tramp says his boots are like corporations. They have no soles.

It is a paradox in the dry goods trade that fast colours don't run.

"Now your talk has the true ring!" as the girl exclaimed when her lover began to talk of "a diamond circle."

A PAPER declares that a man who is wedded to his profession has no mother-in-law. But what if his profession is the legal profession?

FOR seven years a mechanic made a circuit of half-a-mile twice per day rather than pass a powder-magazine. The other day he learned that it had been empty for eight years.

"Is there any case in which it could be wished there was an exception to the rule that one good turn deserves another?" asks a moralist. We think there is—in the case of a hand organ. One good turn of that is enough, without the return.

A SMALL boy was detected by a stingy farmer in one of his cherry trees. The farmer made the boy come down, and talked very seriously to him about the sinfulness of stealing. The boy answered, indignantly: "Now, you just count them cherries over again, and see if there is one of 'em missing before you instate that I took it."

SHE had a lovely foot, and her visitors were admiring it. They were ladies of course. A man who is not a shoemaker dares not mention such a thing unless they are alone in a dim corner of the drawing-room, where nobody else can overhear. "What a beautiful foot you have, dear!" "Yes. Papa says when we go to Paris he'll have a bust of it made."

"PRETTY? No I won't say baby is pretty," declared a young mother, "for I can speak of him impartially, though he is my own; and that's more than most mothers can do. He has lovely blue eyes, perfect in shape; hair like the morning sunshine; mouth—well, no rose-bud could be sweeter; complexion divinely fair; nose just too cunning for anything; in fact, he's faultless. But I won't say he's pretty."

REALISING ITS IMPORTANCE.—She was to be married the next day, and as her old father stroked her hair fondly, he said: "And do you think, my dear, that you have fully considered the important step you are so soon to take? Do you feel that you are thoroughly prepared for—?" "Oh yes, papa," she interrupted brightly; "everything is prepared, and we've had two rehearsals, and George has promised to buy me a pair of ponies as soon as ever we get back from our wedding trip."

"You say the coat is fifteen shillings?" "Fifteen shillings, mine frien'." "And you warrant it all wool?" "All wool except de puttons and putton holes." "How the dickens can you afford to sell a new all-wool coat for fifteen shillings?" "Mine frien', I don't vonder you was surprised. Vy de wool in det goat was vorth morons fifteen shillings." "Then you must lose money on it?" "Py shiminy gracious! you makes me tired! But, mine dear frien', I told you one little segret, and don't you gif it away. De fleecos on de packs of dose sheeps vot grow dot wool was *woolish*, and haf to be sold at great rednations."

YOU are shown a girl baby. You remark: "What! only three months old? Is it possible? I should guess she was at least a year old." And the mother is delighted, and tells everybody that Mr. Smith is a most agreeable gentleman. The baby grows. Ten years later you meet her. "Impossible!" you exclaim; "such a great girl, and only ten years!" Not only mother, but the great girl, is delighted this time. Another ten years passes; but now you have to employ different tactics, something like this: "Twenty years? Nonsense! you can't be more than sixteen, if you are that!" Funny? Yes; and it all goes to show that sauce for the gosling is not necessarily the proper sauce for the goose.

A FALSE COUNT.—The kind that English girls usually marry.

AN ELABORATE WEDDING.—Much Ado about Knotting.

A HINDOO war, like a battle of the cats, is merely a Tom-Tom fight.

THE self-raising flour of the markets is a great boon to those who are unable to raise a barrel of flour themselves.

THE setting hen should be the emblem of Hope. She lives in a state of constant egg-speckedness.

A GENTLEMAN received an unpaid letter, commencing:—"Sir, your letter of yesterday bears upon its face the stamp of falsehood." His answer was brief and to the purpose: "Sir, I only wish your letter of yesterday bore upon its face a stamp of any kind."

BROTHER GEORGE.—"Girls, did you hear what a sad thing happened to Fred Jones yesterday?" Girls (in alarm): "No; what is it?" Brother G.: "The poor fellow had to have his arm taken off." Girls: "Oh, how terrible; how did it happen?" Brother G.: "Well, it happened on the tennis ground. He was sitting by Mrs. Smith; they were then alone, when suddenly he put his arm around her waist." Girls: "Well, go on. What then? What happened?" Brother G.: "Well, it was then it had to be taken off."

WHEN Curran was a young lawyer, he had occasion to speak caustically of a stupid decision made by a pompous judge, who straightened himself to his full height, assumed an air of offended majesty, and asked Curran if he meant "to express his contempt for this Court?" Curran turned to him very deferentially, made a respectful bow and replied, in feigned amazement: "Express my contempt for this court? No! I am trying to conceal it, my lord," adding, as he turned to leave, "but I find it dented hard to do it."

ONE of the clergy of a large Scotch town having been ruralising, was returning home from a day's piscatorial enjoyment, his rod across his shoulder, when he met a youth with whom he was slightly acquainted, who happened to be carrying a bridle in his hand. The divine, thinking to be witty, even at the risk of being personal, pointed significantly to the bridle, and, with a shake of his head and a smile, remarked in passing: "A bridle for the ass;" to which the young man, nothing daunted, and pointing to the fishing-rod over the clerical shoulder, instantaneously rejoined: "And a rod for the fool's back."

"Do you know what is ruining this country?" said Judge Blucker. "I will tell you. It is not over-production, but it is the dishonesty of the people that destroys public and private confidence. I'll give you an example of dishonesty practised upon me by a party named Jimpleson. He came to my house one day and told me that he had one of the best schemes in the world; said that he had a gold mine not far away, and that if he only had a little gold with which to salt it he could sell the claim for one hundred thousand dollars. He was so plausible, talked so fairly, that I was completely taken in. I went with him and looked at the mine. I was in need of about fifty thousand dollars, so I concluded to let him have the gold. He said that he could take a gold-piece, grate it off, and so skillfully embed it in the sand that no one could detect our scheme. 'How much gold will it take?' I asked. 'Oh, about three hundred dollars.' I can take that amount and make the place worth at least one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to us. I gave the money, and he got a grater and went out to the mines. Several days afterwards he invited me to come out. He had done his work well. We invited capitalists to come out and make us a bid. My partner was not present when an assay was made. Good thing for him that he wasn't. He had salted the mine with copper-dust, and had kept the gold. I have not seen him since. Now, don't you see, I lost confidence in him. He is not an honest man."—*American Paper.*

SOCIETY.

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES, accompanied by the Princesses Louise, Victoria, and Maud, have gone to Homburg. The Duke of Cambridge and Major FitzGeorge are also of the party. The journey was a very pleasant one. The Royal party met with an enthusiastic welcome on reaching Dover, where a message from the Queen was handed to the Prince of Wales. Hearty cheers were raised when their Royal Highnesses boarded the *Isar*.

THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT will resume his Indian command next month, and will be accompanied by the Duchess. Their Royal Highnesses will proceed to Marseilles, arriving there on the 8th of September, and will embark in the *Surprise*, the service yacht of the Duke of Edinburgh, in which they will be conveyed to Malta, completing the journey to Bombay in a Peninsular and Oriental steamer.

A BLACK PRINCE.—The sensation of the hour in Paris is the arrival there of Prince Diowley Karamoko, third son of King Samory, a negro chief of Upper Senegal, who signed away his independence last year. The Prince is accompanied by his marabout, his interpreter, two of his father's Ministers, and other persons. He belongs to the tribe of Wolof Serrare, reputed to be the finest, the handsomest, and the darkest race of all Africa. They profess Mohammedanism, but, withal, have not yet entirely renounced certain fetishist practices.

The Wolofs wear short trousers and a kind of frock without sleeves, open at the sides. Their hair is plaited into several braids, and they have numberless amulets tied round their neck with leathern thongs. Prince Diowley has adopted the Arabic costume during his visit and conceals his amulets, but he still plaits his hair according to Soudanese fashion. He occupies apartments in the Grand Hotel, which the French Government have retained for him at a cost of £20 a day. The attendants carry about them on all their excursions pewter jugs containing water for their ablutions.

The marriage of the Earl of Yarborough with the Hon. Marcia Lane Fox, elder daughter of Lady Conyers, was a very grand affair. The bride's handsome dress consisted of bodice and train of rich white satin, plainly made, over a petticoat of rich pearl embroidery; she had a spray of real orange flowers in her hair, and a tulle veil, but wore no jewels.

The bridesmaids' dresses were of white silk with fronts in alternate plaits of crepe and silk, each plait having a row of gold embroidery from the waist to the bottom of the skirt, and the bodice had plaited vests of crepe with the embroidery down each side, and collars and cuffs of embroidery; small white tulle bonnets edged with gold beads, and trimmed with bows of gold and white ribbon, and gold crepe. The bridegroom's present to each was a brooch, the design being two hearts entwined in diamonds, surmounted by a diamond and pearl coronet; and all carried bouquets of yellow roses, intermixed with Stephanotis and brown leaves tied with white ribbons.

Lady Conyers, mother of the bride, wore a handsome dress of grey faille, embroidered in silver, lead, and steel beads, with bonnet to match. The Countess of Yarborough, mother of the bridegroom, was elegantly attired in brown faille frangaise, the jupe being striped with embossed velvet flowers in various shades, and prettily draped with crepe of a lighter shade; the bodice of plain faille was trimmed *en pointe* with the embossed velvet, and the front filled in with finely-plaited crepe, and her bonnet was trimmed with crepe and flowers *en suite*.

STATISTICS.

TEN THOUSAND VACCINATION DEFAULTERS.—The statistics just issued for the last twelve months concerning vaccination in Leicester show that of 5,000 children born only 1,000 were vaccinated, although coercion was in full force for ten months. The defaulters now number about 10,000, involving the issue of 20,000 summonses and 20,000 notices, or a total of 40,000 notices before the law can be enforced. Meanwhile the guardians have decisively stopped all proceedings.

THE POLICE AND THE DOG REGULATIONS.—The total number of dogs not under control taken by the police to the Dogs' Home during the month ending August 11 is 2,993. Of these 52 were killed in the streets as rabid, and 1 developed rabies at the Dogs' Home. There were 567 summonses taken out against owners of dogs not under control; of these 338 have been heard, resulting in 320 convictions and 18 dismissals. Of the 52 dogs killed in the streets as being rabid or savage the diseases are as follows:—Number afflicted with rabies, 15; bitten by a mad dog, 1; not examined (taken by owners who refused to have carcasses examined), 3; afflicted with epilepsy, 20; afflicted with fits, 2; afflicted with convulsions, 6; afflicted with acute peritonitis, 1; ferocious or savage, 4; total, 52; rabid at Dogs' Home, 1—total, 53. Sixty-five persons are known to have been bitten by dogs during the month—49 civilians and 16 police-constables by dogs not known to have been mad, and 6 civilians and 3 police-constables by dogs known to have been mad. One case of hydrophobia has been reported as having occurred in London during the month.

GEMS.

The proudest triumph in a man's life is when he makes a friend of an enemy. The joy is then akin to that which angels feel as they rejoice over a sinner that repenteth.

What a contrast there sometimes is between the adjective and the adverb. Reflect, for example, on the wide difference that exists between the man who is constant in love and the man who is constantly in love!

Kind words cost no more than unkind ones. Kind words produce kind actions, not only on the part of those to whom they are addressed, but on the part of those by whom they are employed; and this not incidentally only, but habitually, in virtue of the principle of association.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

DARK SPONGE PUDDING.—One-half a pound of flour, one teaspoonful of yeast-powder, two ounces of finely-chopped suet, and one teacup of treacle. Steam in the mould for four hours. Serve with wine and hard sauce.

GINGER BEER.—Two and a half pounds of loaf-sugar, one and a half ounces of bruised ginger, one ounce of cream of tartar, the rind and juice of two lemons, three gallons of boiling water, two large tablespoonfuls of thick and fresh brewer's yeast.

LEMON SYRUP.—Four six quarts of boiling water on five pounds of loaf sugar, one and a half ounces of tartaric acid, and half an ounce of whole ginger, slightly bruised. Let it stand till cold, then add two ounces of essence of lemon; strain and bottle.

A CAPITAL WAY TO SERVE POTATOES is to peel, cut them in very thin slices, and lay them in cold water and salt for an hour or more; then dry them on a towel, and throw them into a deep kettle of smoking hot fat and fry them a light brown; take them out of the fat with a skimmer into the colander, scatter over them a teaspoonful of salt, shake them well about, and turn in a hot dish to serve.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE may be more pathos in the fall of a collar, or the curl of a lock, than the shallow think for. Should we be so apt as we are now to compassionate the misfortunes, and to forgive the insincerity of Charles I. if his pictures had portrayed him in a bob-wig and a pigtail? Vandyke was a greater sophist than Hamlet.

EVERY man has a paradise around him till he sins and the angel of an accusing conscience drives him from his Eden. And even then there are holy hours when this angel sleeps, and man comes back, and, with the innocent eyes of a child, looks into his lost paradise again—through the broad gates, at the rural solitudes of nature.

BEAUTY.—Beauty attracts the eye at first; but after you come to know people very intimately, you do not know whether they are pretty or not. In time the soul expresses itself to you, and it is that which you see. A man who has been married twenty years hardly knows what his wife looks like. He may think he does, and tell you she is a bewitching little brunette, long after she has reached middle life; because the image of his early love is in his heart, and he doesn't see her as she is to-day. Or, being an indifferent husband, he may not know she is the fine woman that other people think her. You have known men who have married the plainest women and think them beauties; and you know beauties who, are quite thrown away on men who value a wife for her success as a cook.

THIN SHOES.—An old story, you say, but worth repeating, for all that. A prominent physician with whom I walked the other day, while the crowd of women out shopping was greatest, called my attention to the fact that while as a rule they were warmly clad, many in ulsters and sacks, few of them had suitable foot gear. It is almost invariable that women with heavy garments wear thin morocco or thin leather shoes, with soles like wafers. My companion said: "We are called on every day to treat cases of pneumonia and severe attacks of lung troubles and colds which are traceable directly to the foolish and fatal habit of wearing thin foot covering. Women are vain of their feet, and will not don comfortable calfskins or thick soles. Neither will they wear goloshes, except in wet weather, and then not always. The stone pavements are terrible places for women to walk without suitable foot gear. They are calculated to send a chill all over the body, and then, with their present habits in this regard, ladies wonder why they are so often afflicted. The reason is very simple."

LOSING OUR TEETH.—The alternative as to whether man was created or developed can no longer be raised, now that we are exercising the free use of our reason. Man's dentition has to be judged from our experiences made in the mammalian group. Hence, first of all, it is a reduced dentition. True, we do not know the definite stages by which it was attained in man, any more than we do in the case of the anthropomorphoids and all the other apes of the Old World, but we shall not hesitate to maintain that the ancestors of man possessed a fuller number of teeth, as long as deductions are justified from the observation of facts. Our teeth have decreased in number during the course of our geologico-zoological development; we have lost on either side, above and below, two incisors, two premolars and one molar. By this we transfer ourselves back to those periods from which the jaw of the otocyon has been preserved. Baume, our eminent odontologist, in a recent work which we have repeatedly referred to, has successfully followed and pointed out cases of atavism or reversion in the human jaw, by tracing cases of surplus teeth—and certain dental formations met with in the jaws in a large percentage of cases—back to those portions of the jaw in the animal ancestors of man which have disappeared in the course of ages.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

L. M.—Clipping the eye-lashes with scissors sometimes promotes their growth.

ROSE.—Glycerine, diluted with pure Cologne water, will help to keep the hands soft and white.

E. L. P. B.—All hair dyes are more or less injurious to the hair. Let them alone.

W. H. P.—Any one can learn to write neatly and legibly by careful and persevering practice, in copying good handwriting.

JOE.—Horeness caused by stings is sometimes remedied by taking five or six drops of nitric acid in a glass of sugar and water.

ROSE.—If you would keep your face free from pimples, &c., avoid very fat, rich, or salt food. A dose of magnesia taken occasionally will help to rid the system of ordinary impurities.

W. H.—To take oil and grease out of boards, make a paste with fuller's earth and hot water, and cover the spots. Let the paste dry on, and the next day scour it off with soft or yellow soap.

M. L. D.—In the seven years of the Revolutionary War Great Britain sent to America about 113,000 soldiers and 22,000 seamen. The forces raised by the United States during the same period consisted of about 289,000 soldiers.

A. C. C.—Animal food should be partaken of more sparingly in the summer than in the winter season, on account of its heating the blood. Authorities on the subject think that meat once a day is sufficient in hot weather.

LENA.—Stains in marble caused by oil can be removed by applying common clay saturated with benzoline. If the grease has remained some time it will have become solidified, and may injure the polish, but the stain will be removed.

G. R. S.—Wilhelm I., German Emperor and King of Prussia, was born on March 22, 1797. He ascended the throne of Prussia at the death of his brother, January 2, 1861. He was proclaimed Emperor of Germany at Versailles, on January 18, 1871.

GOLDEN HAIR.—A very agreeable tooth wash is made as follows: Dissolve two ounces of borax in three pints of boiling water, and before it is cold add one teaspoonful of spirits of camphor, and bottle for use. Use a tablespoonful, mixed with an equal quantity of tepid water, night and morning.

L. D.—The execution of Michael Barrett, concerned in the plot to blow up Clerkenwell Prison, at Newgate, London, on May 26, 1868, was the last public execution in England. On September 8, 1868, the first private execution took place, inside of Newgate, being that of a man named Mackay for murder.

M. C. H.—The gentler sex should never force their attentions upon a man; it is the duty of the latter to make, and not receive advances. If the person named desires an acquaintance, he should seek it through the legitimate channel of an introduction by a friend of both.

S. H. H.—Freckles are sometimes dispersed with a wash made of one ounce of lemon juice, a quarter of a drachm of powdered borax, and half a drachm of loaf sugar. Add two wineglassfuls of pure water, and mix. Let it stand a day or two, and then apply night and morning. If the freckles prove obstinate, make the liquor over again, and apply as before.

B. K. L.—Sprinkle pulverised borax over the plants or places infested by black ants, &c. Another remedy is quassa chips, three and a half ounces; lukewarm water, five drachms; boil these together in seven pints of water until the decoction is reduced to five pints. When the liquid cools, strain, and use with a watering pot or syringe, as may be most convenient.

M. V. N.—The Pacific Ocean is the largest ocean on the globe. The European discoverer of it was Vasco Nunes de Balboa, who September 26, 1513, saw it from one of the mountains near the Isthmus of Darien. It was first traversed by Magalhães. From him it received the name of Pacific, on account of the constant fair weather with which he was favoured during his voyage. Its maximum depth is about 3,000 fathoms.

A. B. D.—An excellent ginger wine is made as follows: Boil together for half an hour seven quarts of water, six pounds of sugar, two ounces of the best ginger, bruised, and the rinds of three good sized lemons. When lukewarm, put the whole into a cask, with the juice of the lemons and a quarter of a pound of raisins. Add one spoonful of new yeast, and stir the wine every day for ten days. When the fermentation has ceased, add an half ounce of isinglass and half a pint of brandy. Bung close, and in about two months the wine will be fit to bottle.

LITTLE WONDER.—The form of the ark constructed by Noah, according to the Biblical account, for the preservation of his family and of the different species of animals during the deluge, was that of an oblong chest, while its dimensions were 300 cubits in length, 50 in breadth, and 30 in height. It was made capable of floating upon the waters, not for sailing or for progression. The Scripture says merely: "Make thee an ark of gopher-wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. . . . A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it."

BESSIE.—Let your hair alone. All hair colouring is more or less injurious.

E. A.—Any kind of frizzing is injurious to the hair. It is now going out of fashion.

E. L. B.—To remove blackheads from the nose and forehead bathe them in a tolerably strong solution of borax and water.

O. F. W.—Yellow dock root or sarsaparilla will help to purify the blood. Chemists keep preparation of either, or both combined.

NELLY T.—1. The moles have no meaning whatever. 2. The cheapest and most effectual tooth powder is prepared chalk. 3. The lock of hair enclosed is dark brown.

W. C. H.—Blotches on the face are often readily removed by dabbing on them a little camphor spirit three or four times a day. Apply it particularly after washing.

LETITIA.—Voltaire, the French author, is sometimes called the "Philosopher of Ferney," from his chateau of Ferney, on French territory, but near the Swiss confines, where he passed the last twenty years of his life.

D. G.—It is a question of ethics which you should be able to decide for yourself; but, in our judgment, as there are degrees of sins, the violation of a divine command must be considered the greater of the two referred to.

GRACE.—The Queen has had five daughters. Victoria (her first) married the Crown Prince of Germany, Friedrich Wilhelm; Alice, the Grand Duke of Hesse, Louis IV.; Helena, Prince Frederick Christian, of Schleswig-Holstein; Louise, the Marquis of Lorne (John Douglas Sutherland); Beatrice, Prince Henry of Battenberg. Alice died in 1878.

"SHUTTING OUT CARE."

We may open the door to our neighbours,
And open the door to our friends;
We may entertain guests at our table,
While friendship with courtesy blends;

We may gather our dear ones about us—
Our halps and children so fair—
But let us forget not to banish
From these tender meetings, dull care.

It watches at doors and at windows;
It whistles through crannies and cracks;
It gives the good man the headache;
It pinches and tortures and racks.

It sits down unasked at the table;
It crouches beside the down bed;
It takes all the brightness from number;
It takes all the sweetness from bread.

Of all things to make our lives happy,
Of all things to make our paths fair,
There is nothing from Home's cheerful fireside
So sacred like shutting out care.

K. M.

L. C. Y.—When a gentleman asks a lady to dance, she should accept the invitation with a few words, such as "With pleasure!" or "Certainly!" provided, of course, that no previous engagement has been made, in which case he should be politely informed of the fact.

JOE D.—To ascertain the merits of the literary productions, send them to a publisher, and do not be discouraged if they are returned as below the required standard. It is useless to imagine that you can immediately jump into literary popularity, that goal being reached only after years of the most painstaking, persistent efforts.

MARY JANE E.—The most approved method of pickling small cucumbers or gherkins is the following:—First pack them in a stone jar, or wooden bucket, in layers, strewing salt thickly between them. Cover the top layer with salt, and pour on cold water enough to cover all. Lay a small plate or board upon them, with a clean stone to keep it down. They may be left in brine for a week or a month, stirring up from the bottom every other day. If the longer time, the salt and water should be strong enough to bear an egg. If you raise your own cucumbers, pick them every day and place them in the pickle. When ready to put them up throw off the brine, also discarding any of the gherkins that have become soft, and lay the rest in cold water for six hours; change the water then for fresh, and leave it for another day. Prepare the pickling kettle by lining it with green vine leaves, and lay the pickles evenly within it, scattering powdered alum over the layers. A bit of alum as large as a pigeon's egg will be sufficient for a 2-gallon kettle. Fill with cold water, cover with vine leaves, three deep, put the lid or pan over all, and steam over a slow fire five or six hours, not allowing the water to boil. When the pickles are a very fine green, remove the leaves and place the former in very cold water, and let them stand until the vinegar is prepared. To 1 gallon of vinegar, allow 1 cup of sugar, 3 dozen each of whole black peppers and cloves, half as much allspice, and 1 dozen blades of mace. Boil five minutes, put the cucumbers into a stone jar, and pour the vinegar over them scalding hot, and cover closely. Two days after reascend the vinegar and return to the pickles. Repeat the process three times more at intervals of two, four and six days. Finally, cover tightly and keep in a cool, dry place, examining them every few weeks. They will be ready for use in two months.

ROSE.—Paint the nailen with iodine. If necessary repeat the operation until it is got rid of.

MAUD.—Remarkably clean, neat penmanship, and first-class spelling.

"WAL. 25."—There is no such book published, but you might obtain any information you require on the subject by writing to the Secretary.

AN IRISH GIRL. writes a nice flowing hand, and if writing be an index to character, should be neat and careful, probably not quite so impulsive as many of her fair countrymen.

NANNIE AND SCARLET.—We presume you mean a work on "Etiquette." There are a dozen manuals, and you can get a good one from any respectable bookseller for a shilling.

TOM T.—It will be found a most laborious task to learn to speak a foreign language without a teacher, for the reason that the correct methods of pronunciation cannot be thoroughly understood unless imparted orally by one having a good knowledge of such.

GEORGINA.—A young lady who is engaged to be married would be committing a breach of propriety and etiquette by attending a ball in company with some other gentleman, even though her affianced husband is absent from the neighbourhood. Such an action would be sure to expose her to unenviable gossip, and, in many a case, cause a breaking off of the engagement.

POLLY.—The teasing of your sisters regarding your male acquaintances is doubtless caused by a feeling of jealousy on their part. They in all probability are not blessed with as much personal attractiveness as yourself, and to make up for shortcomings in that respect, vent their ill-feeling by saying harsh, cruel things about you, and glorying in your discomfiture. Do not let such petty trifles worry you; but on the contrary, return their sarcasm with laughter.

E. F. F.—To remove the green that gathers on bricks, pour over the bricks boiling water in which any vegetables (not greasy) have been boiled. Do this for several days in succession. To make a red wash for bricks, melt one ounce of glue in a gallon of water; while hot, put in a piece of alum the size of an egg, half a pound of Venetian red, and one pound of Spanish brown. Try a little on the bricks, let it dry, and if too light, add more red and brown; if too dark, put in more water.

TRINITY COLLEGE.—Take the waits to a music publisher who will give you an estimate of the cost of printing. It will, of course, depend on the style and the number of copies you will require. If you wish to sell it outright, make a fair copy and submit it to any well-known music publisher, who will tell you upon trying it whether he will buy it or not. The registration at Stationers' Hall is no protection whatever. It is simply a form that must be gone through prior to bringing an action for infringement.

N. L. C.—Estimates of the total number of gipsies in Europe are variously given from 500,000 to 700,000. The severe laws against them have in most countries fallen into desuetude; they no longer being able to impose upon the credulity of the people, as in other days. There are many roving tribes in India and Persia which resemble the gipsies. Organised bands of gipsies first appeared in the Danubian provinces in 1417. They numbered about 14,000 in Italy as early as 1422. They appeared in Spain in 1447, in England about 1506, and in Sweden in 1514. Wherever they have wandered they have practised the arts of thieving and deception.

R. D. D.—Those persons who are partial to sweet cider resort to various methods for arresting fermentation, such as putting a handful of powdered clay into each barrel, or two or three pounds of well-burned charcoal. Another plan is to mix 1 pint of fresh slaked lime with 1 quart of new milk, and then stir the mixture into each open barrel of cider. After remaining for about ten hours, the pommace will rise to the surface and may be skimmed off; the clear cider can be drawn off by means of a faucet inserted near the bottom of the barrel. It is advisable to strain it as soon as drawn off, to separate any hardened pommace that may remain in it. Some persons consider that the addition of a gill of mustard seed to each barrel will preserve the sweetness of cider. Whatever method be adopted, the cider must be drawn off into very clean, sweet casks and closely watched. The moment white bubbles are perceived rising at the bung-hole, rack it again. Another popular plan for excluding all action of the air from the surface of the cider, and thus preserving its sweetness, is the addition of a tumbler of sweet oil before closing the bung-hole of each cask.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by J. R. Speck; and Printed by Woodfall and Kneass, Milford Lane, Strand.